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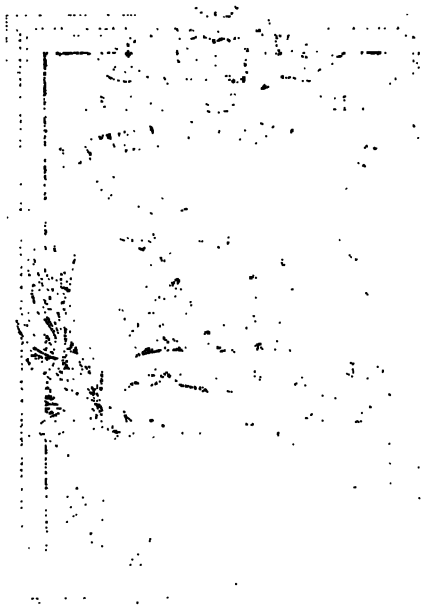

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WHERE MEN DECAY

WHERE MEN DECAY

A SURVEY OF PRESENT RURAL CONDITIONS

By
D. C. PEDDER
Lieut.-Col.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

LONDON: A. C. FIFIELD
44 Fleet Street, E.C.
1908

To My Wife

PREFACE

Reclass. 10-12-29 A.V.K. / V.

WITH a single exception all the essays contained in this volume have been already before the public. They are now reprinted by the courteous permission of the editors of the reviews in which they originally appeared. That they once possessed interest is vouched for by the names of the *Nineteenth*, the *Contemporary* and the *Monthly* Reviews. Unfortunately, the interest of a magazine article is apt to be evanescent. Cinders are of no great value though their fiery moment may have spent itself in the furnace of a "Lusitania." Still, whatever bears immediately upon a question of great public moment, necessarily contracts a part of its importance and retains it until a solution is reached. Evidence in a lawsuit keeps its value till the case is finally disposed of. Now the claim to attention made by nearly all these papers rests entirely upon the fact that they are evidential, that they represent direct observation of the conditions of labouring life in the country and are, consequently, in their degree material to the proper understanding of the great plea of LABOUR *versus* LAND which is now going on in our midst. It is not going well for Labour. The counsel for the defence are urging reasons for non-suiting the plaintiff, or, should that

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be impossible, of putting him off with present infinitesimal crumbs of comfort and deferring judgement *sine die*. And they have the ear of the court. Corrupt influences are at work. The judges are interested parties. Many of the advocates who received their fees at the polls for pleading the cause of the landless and homeless peasant are afraid of losing social repute if they should possibly obtain a decisive verdict in his favour. They are like the Parliamentarian generals up to the time of Naseby. They do not desire thorough success. It is time for the masses to take an active interest in what so nearly concerns them. The throwing open of the land to labour does not only affect the agricultural population (at present but a small fraction of the English people) but every man whose breathing is choked for want of space in every town in England. If a window had been thrown open in the Black Hole of Calcutta, the relief it gave to the suffocating wretches inside would not have been confined to those immediately round it. The breath of life would have reached them all. No chink is too insignificant to be of use if it only lets one ray of publicity into the range of gloomy vaults upon which the palace of social injustice is built. Publicity is the only treatment to which abuses yield. The Land-Lupus which is eating away the face of the English people will go on with its hideous ravages until the concentrated light of public knowledge is poured upon it—and kept upon it. Publicity brings healing on its wings. We see this everywhere. Even in country villages the material conditions of labouring life have been

alleviated since the search-ray of the Press was turned upon them. Some years ago *The Daily News* sent a commissioner to report upon Wiltshire cottages. It was surprising to see how rapidly externals, at any rate, improved. New thatch and whitewash made hovels look idyllic. And the improvement did not stop there. Wages are considerably better than they were a dozen years back. The rural exodus, the war, the multiplication of cows and consequent diminution in the number of day labourers available for the casual occasions of agriculture have all contributed to this result. But more is due to the conviction of the employer of labour that his dealings with his men are no longer secure from public comment. He orders himself accordingly. Tyrants are less despotic, women are treated with less incivility, methods of civilization sometimes take the place of the bullying and brow-beating in which overfed and imperfectly educated men will habitually indulge as long as they think themselves safe from observation. Publicity has done *something*.

What does the labourer want more? He wants Home and Hope. And Land-monopoly denies them both. The roof over his head depends upon the caprice of an employer, his old age is relegated, as a matter of course, to what Thackeray calls "the tender musses of the Union House." What he can reasonably be expected to be under such conditions, that he is. Home is the great enemy of Drink. Drink is dominant. Home is the great educator. His children are uneducated. The Landed interest and the Church know this perfectly, and

they are perfectly content that such a state of things should continue. They are evil counsellors to whom England has listened too long. Let Labour arise and let his enemies be scattered.

D. C. P.

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I

Where are the Village Gentry?

MOST of us have lately seen a map which shows by dots the number of copies of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* sold in England, with their local distribution. Let us call each dot a family able to appreciate and pay for a costly intellectual luxury. The whole will then represent a percentage taken at random upon the entire number of such families, which may be called, fairly enough, the plums in our national pudding. As its general quality must depend in large measure upon the thoroughness with which the enriching ingredients are compounded with the plain dough, it is easy to see that the map may have an interest beyond its original purpose. For the purpose of my argument I will assume that the same influences which have determined the position of these families would operate similarly upon the whole of the independent class in England, down to the level at which the term "gentility" ceases to be applied and that the map may be taken as giving a rough idea of the distribution of the whole.

We must not, of course, expect to find the dots sown with the regularity of corn, so many to each square inch. Each wealth-producing centre is naturally the nucleus of a nebula. But the map is

also blurred with masses which bear no rational proportion to the population of the parts where they occur. The dots seem naturally confluent. Astronomers say that all matter must ultimately coalesce. A similar destiny appears to await our well-to-do families. The coast-line from Weymouth to Margate is already almost a continuous ant-hill. Bath, Bournemouth, Brighton, all represent clusters of sheer plums and imply corresponding wastes of flour and water. It is no exaggeration to say that three-quarters of the vast congeries crowded round the west and south-west of London have only a voluntary attachment to their centre, and that South Kensington by itself represents hundreds of square miles from which the fertilizing elements of wealth and culture have been extracted. These elements, all England over, are steadily drifting into what we may fairly call "pleasure cities."

Every movement has its cry. The slogan of this was originally "Health." Gout and consumption drove the well-to-do to "watering-places." Amusement came shyly in as an alleviation to enforced exile. By-and-by it began to attract on its own account. Pleasure found a place, on the posters, with Business, in small letters, lower down. A good deal was done in the way of marrying and giving in marriage. Resident populations grew up, but they were for a long time composed entirely of exceptional cases. Every new settler had to produce an individual justification for what was *prima facie* a desertion of duty. A professedly leisured class was then hardly recognized. Education was much in-

voked. " The girls " could get advantages at Cheltenham. The necessity of retrenchment spread a threadbare mantle over many shirkers. That " the girls " must have advantages and that the family position must be kept up if the family stayed in their old home were postulates not to be challenged without offence. As newcomers multiplied, excuses were taken for granted. People go nowadays to live at Clifton or South Kensington simply and frankly because τῇπερ ῥηΐστη βιοτὴ πέλει ἀνθρώποισιν. The consequence is that all over rural England village manor-houses of the smaller sort are occupied by farmers or land agents, while the people who used to, and ought to, inhabit them are pursuing amusement in the only places where they are now capable of finding it—that is, where they are in sufficient numbers to call themselves " Society."

The history of the change of habits which made the impulse to this desertion of duty almost irresistible may be worth tracing.

In pre-macadamite days villages were almost islands. Their inhabitants, rich or poor, were " companions of a cave." Class distinctions interfered but little with familiar intercourse. The art of conversation (in the wider sense of the word) with their social inferiors was one in which gentlefolk had necessarily to be proficient. The village came in for an amount of attention from " the house " that would now seem absurd. Every poor woman had a right to " Madam's " ear. Crabbe's poems were bought by half the squires in England because tales of village life had a genuine relish for their ears. Ladies were then able to understand the rude

speech and ruder habits of thought of the poor they lived among enough to follow their disjointed narratives with comprehension and interest. The Scriptural charity, so conveniently contemned in the present day, the feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and visiting the sick and sorrowful, made up nine-tenths of the religion of the country gentry. It was in "the house" that the conscience of the little community was supposed to reside. The squire might be rough and dominant, but it was felt that with him *noblesse oblige* was a more potent consideration than the balance of profit. His presence in their midst gave the cottagers a sense of security they have now wholly lost. "The grand old name of gentleman" was then a word of power. It is still sometimes appealed to much as a Kanaka in one of the floating hells of trade might invoke a discredited fetish of his pagan forefathers. "If you was a *gentleman* you wouldn't 'a' done it," says the labourer to the great farmer who possesses in abundance all the outward and visible signs of gentility. The great man is justly indignant. Gentleman! he is a gentleman. Does he not dine late? Do not his wife's dresses come from London? The old meaning of the word lingers in the labourer's mind. For the master its connotation is lost.

The social severance of the rural gentry from the labouring poor was the result of the improvement of roads and multiplication of books which marked the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The company of equals was easier to come by, and imaginative reading began to steal away the interest

which the perpetual drama of the village had formerly absorbed. The outer and the inner life became alike exclusive. Gentlefolk no longer talked *with* the poor, they talked *to* them. Intercourse still continued and still retained its kindly character. But in the course of a half-century the rich had made an enormous advance in the culture that intensifies social enjoyment. The poor had stayed, have stayed almost exactly where they were. The two classes had ceased to find *pleasure* in each other's company. Speaking largely, the gentry had come to feel that all that gave savour to life was the fraction of it spent with companions of their own social level. This was the reason that when in later years the fall of rents, by reducing the amount that landowners could spend in "seeing company," again contracted neighbourhoods, the isolation of country families was more complete and less tolerable than in earlier times. The bicycle might have saved the situation, but the day of the wheel had not yet dawned, and when its dusty and perspiring delights at length revealed themselves to mankind, the lords of the land were already in full retreat. It was the old story of the *Peau de Chagrin.* The magic skin which represented the pleasurableness of existence had shrunk alarmingly. How could it be stretched? Satan, as usual, was ready with a suggestion. Prices had again gone up. The squires tried to appropriate the additional value of what was grown on their land. They raised the rents. The farmers had to pay, but they recouped themselves by lowering wages. Six shillings a week was a usual labourer's wage. Men in full work lived on

barley bread. Ploughboys would fight in the field for a bit of bacon rind dropped by a careless carter, and mothers of families thought themselves lucky if they had a stolen swede to boil in the pot for the family supper. Then came the Labourers' Union, that despairing protest of men ground between the upper and the nether millstones of high prices and low wages against a state of things which gentry, farmers and parsons concurred in regarding as lawful and right. The simple fact was that the lust for that particular form of enjoyment we call "Society," with its costly concomitants, which had invaded the upper classes, could only be gratified in the country by a personal expenditure which the land was utterly unable to meet while continuing to maintain the farmers in the abundant comfort they demanded as a right and also to give anything remotely approaching the decencies of existence to the labouring poor. The tension was relieved by the withdrawal of many of the smaller country gentry, who left their duties behind them to be looked after by anyone who chose, much as the ordinary London householder leaves his cats when he goes down for a month to the seaside.

Let us leave the deserting squires to the enjoyment of such good things as the god of shirkers has provided for them that love him, the golf and the club and the esplanade, and the constant exchange of opinions on foreign policy with others of their sort. Their sons people the professions, their daughters dabble in art, dress like fashion-plates and whizz about upon wheels in the insatiable craving for companionship. All is very well with

them. But how is it with the villagers? Is it possible that the present steady efflux of labourers is due to a change in their position resulting from the absence of a class necessary to the equilibrium of rural life? Are they leaving the land because so many of the smaller gentry have left it already?

Most practical men will say, No. According to them, the substitution of the large farmer for the small squire has shown itself to be for the advantage of the cottagers. Put your finger, they say, upon any single point in which the labourer has suffered from, or even since, the departure of the family of very ordinary people who lived some thirty or forty years ago in the Court or the Grange now occupied by Mr Bishop, the agent, or Mr Gorgibus the great farmer. Any salutary influence they might once have possessed had long disappeared. Their charities, their gifts of food and money and clothing, only sapped the self-reliance and self-respect which better wages and the exercise of political rights were naturally producing in the labouring class. Their presence was a clog upon the healthy development of the new social life which was springing up under a more rational *régime*. The country labourer is no worse off now than he has always been: there are, indeed, strong grounds for saying that he is better off than he has ever been. The healthfulness of the conditions under which he lives is shown by his longevity, his wages are better than they were, his housing not worse, his food cheaper and more varied, his hours of work shorter. Moral and intellectual requirements are provided for by churches, free schools and reading-rooms.

The Local Government Act has given him the power of controlling the public affairs of his parish. This general improvement has opened the eyes of the younger men to the existence of still higher individual possibilities. They leave the village to seek their fortunes in the world. The impulse is one common to most healthy and well-fed young men of the English race. If our practical man is a farmer and a churchwarden, he will probably add *sotto voce*, "Jehu waxed fat and kicked."

The case so put is a strong one, all the stronger because the facts it rests upon are intelligible at a glance. But man does not live by bread alone. His well-being is affected by things quite imperceptible to superficial observation. Let me give an illustration. Horse-copers used to disguise an obscure disease in a horse's foot by severing the nerve connecting the foot with the horse. Pain and lameness ceased, the animal was apparently sound. But by-and-by the hoof sloughed off. It was through the smaller resident gentry that vital connexion was kept up between England and the rural poor. The *solidarité* of the village with the whole social system has been compromised by their partial withdrawal. Its labouring inhabitants are "out caste," debarred by their position from any intercourse with the only superior class with which they usually come in contact, in which their degradation is not a recognized fact.

Nothing can seem more absurd, nothing is more bitterly true. Let me explain the situation as I see it.

Within the last generation or so a great class

promotion has taken place in rural England, but it is one in which the rural poor have not had a part. The farmers have gone up, and the poor have stayed where they were. Miss Betham Edwards, herself once a farmer and come of farming folk, has recently called attention to the remarkable change in their style of living within her own memory. The fact is one of common notoriety. "They live like gentlefolk," is the way the poor put it. This is, of course, their own concern. But in adopting the habits of the disappearing gentry they considered themselves to have also stepped into their position in the social scale, thus leaving the actual tillers of the soil behind and below them at the whole interval of a missing class.

Social ambition is so universal that to condemn it is to waste words. Success in agricultural pursuits is as legitimate a means of rising as any other, and the ladder of ascent may be planted on a farm exactly as well as on a factory. Individual climbers are speedily indistinguishable among the class to which they have raised themselves. Each rung has brought its lesson. So it is with the man who rises through the ranks to a commission. But it is different when promotions are sudden and comprehensive. Class characteristics have to be assumed in a hurry and the most obvious are the first laid hold of. Essentials can wait. Aristocratic hauteur and exclusiveness are at the same time an assertion of position and a buckler against inconsiderate familiarity. They are easily put on and they fit at once. The consequence is that there is probably no one in the world whose bearing to his inferiors is so lofty as

that of the modern farmer. His intercourse with the drudges of the field is limited to curt orders or conclusive remarks. "Talking it over," that sovereign salve for the irritation that springs from imperfect comprehension, is a thing of the past. It requires fine tact to be habitually brusque without being occasionally brutal. " Your wife's away, isn't she?" asks a master. "No, sir. She's been sick abed for the last month." "H'm! *Nothing infectious*, I hope." "Have you had a ba-aby, Mrs Hack? I didn't know you had a ba-aby," drawls a great lady of this class to a labourer's wife who is nursing a six weeks' old child at the door of her cottage not fifty yards from "The Hall." There was nothing strange in her ignorance. No servant would have thought of mentioning a matter so utterly alien to genteel interest as a birth in a labourer's cottage. *Personal* neighbourly intercourse there is none. A cutting remark may draw tears; it is never openly resented. A perfectly respectable woman, a wife and a mother, had to appear before a village magnate sitting in some official capacity. She gave her name. "Smith? Smith? Don't know you. Husband's name?" " Jabez, sir." "Oh! I know. *And a nice lot too!*" "He had no *right* to say it," she said afterwards. "What had we done?" Of course he had no right. He might have had an excuse. He might have been mad, or drunk. He was neither. He was only a great farmer speaking to a labourer's wife.

The change has been sudden. Balls, dinner-parties, garden-parties, "Society," all these words are of comparatively recent importation into the agricultural vocabulary. They are lived up to.

Dress keeps pace with the occasions for displaying it. The sedulous care of the hands, the eternal gloves, the religious insistence upon minutiæ of delicacy which makes in a farm-house the omission of a salver in a maid's handing a letter matter for outraged indignation, all these trifles give an idea of the gap between two grades that originally formed a continuous incline. "She've served me with a pound of bacon," was the comment upon a *grande dame* alighting from her carriage, "and she won't put her foot to ground now without a bit of carpet to set it on!" I think this was an exaggeration. I did not see the carpet, which was probably only immaterially present. But rises are certainly of startling rapidity. The ranks of the many-acred are largely recruited from the trading class, the grocers of large villages, the butchers of country towns, whose thorough practical acquaintance with rural matters justifies the transference of their accumulated gains to the land, which tempts them with the promises of a distinct and immediate social elevation. They assume the tone of their new society with little difficulty. Money disarms criticism, manners are easily acquired, and the general standard of the class they enter is much the same as that of the class they leave. The caustic remark I have quoted was truth in pictorial form.

There are things that England has not courage enough to look squarely in the face. The village question is one. We are all agreed in thinking that as the vigour of our urban populations is only kept up by the continuous infusion of country blood, the condition of the village breeding-grounds is of

high importance. The young stock should be born, bred and reared under the healthiest conditions possible, moral as well as physical. We hear constantly that the growth of hooliganism in great towns constitutes a serious menace to society. Does the surplus population of the country which flows constantly into the slums carry with it such a prepossession in favour of order and constituted authority as may justify us in regarding it as a continuous reinforcement to good?

The dominating influence in our villages is that of the great farmers. Are they, as a class, fit depositaries of a national trust upon which so much depends?

The proverb "Give a dog a bad name," etc., stands good inverted. We are all naturally inclined to associate the words "British farmer" with a group of eminently British virtues, honesty at their head. But standards of conduct differ with classes. *Noblesse oblige* is different from "professional honour," which again owns restrictions unknown to "commercial morality." "Agricultural honesty" probably satisfies the agricultural conscience, but we should be wrong in unreservedly identifying it with the honesty of common parlance.

Nothing is more remarkable in English village life than the completeness with which the employers have lost the confidence of the men.

I have never asked a labourer what he thought of his master. To do so would defeat the object of the inquiry. But *obiter dicta* carry conviction. Mine is that the belief that right is *never* done for righteousness' sake underlies the whole relation of the

peasant to the farmer. Here is a scrap of dialogue repeated with grim humour as having passed between two aged men, one a farmer "universally respected" in his class, the other a decayed labourer to whom circumstances had given his *franc parler*. They were at odds about something. "John," said the *vir pietate gravis*, "I only wish to do what is right." "Well," replied the son of the soil, "I've knowed ee now going on sixty year, and if you be a-going to do what's right *now*, it'll be the fust time as I ever *knowed* it of ee and the fust time as I ever *heerd* it of ee." A Conservative M.P. said last year in the House of Commons that the Employers' Liability Act of 1880 was of no use in villages, because the only available witnesses were the sufferer's fellow-workmen, and they would not give evidence against their master. The implication, of course, was that the "honest farmer" would make them repent of speaking the honest truth.

The simple fact is that the conception of conduct of the class in general is lower than it was in their less pretentious days. The temptations to sharp practice are greater because "Society" is insatiable in its demands upon the pocket. Some extra gain must be made out of every transaction, however small. "What's your bill?" said a wealthy agriculturist to a struggling labourer who had undertaken "a job." "Ah! two pounds two and a penny. Receipt it." The man did so. " Here you are," handing him a couple of sovereigns. "*You make me a present of the change.*" Nothing embitters life like the consciousness of being taken small advantage of at every turn or corner, and this con-

sciousness is perpetually present with the rural poor. In order to keep up his present style of living, the farmer *must* pinch. And the person he pinches is the labourer.

Physique is not a bad test of morale. Go into any market and note the vast bulk of the farmers who attend it. The other day at an agricultural show at Cardiff *twenty-three* failed to pass an ordinary turnstile. Are the habits of life that induce this habit of body compatible with serious work, or with the moral tone befitting men to whom a great national interest is committed? Some years ago an article from the pen of a farmer at the Cape appeared in a leading English magazine. He contrasted, hour by hour and day by day, the life of a great agriculturist in South Africa with that of his British compeer, and heaped unmitigated scorn upon the sloth and self-indulgence of the latter. Prejudice! well, watch the life of one. He dawdles a little in the saddle over his farm, attends a market or two in the week, shoots a little, hunts now and then, goes to town pretty often, takes his wife occasionally to the seaside. It is a pleasant and harmless existence. But when we add heavy eating and constant moderate drinking, and remember that beyond the mere keeping of accounts, chaffering at market and directing routine work, intellectual exertion there is none whatever in his life, we are driven to believe that the whole man is materialized, that the higher issues of life are non-existent for him. Facts seem to bear out this belief. No class produces so few men of eminence as this. Crofters and "statesmen," small yeomen and working farmers, have been

honourably represented by sons of distinction in every department of English intellectual and practical life. Where are the sons of the great farmers in the race? Not placed.

It is from men like these that village lads draw their ideas of the whole social fabric. It is to them an association of the rich, strong enough to compel the submission of the poor. They learn early that a cow and a labourer supply milk and labour to a master whose object is to incur no more expense in their keep than will prevent the supply of milk, or of labour, from falling off, and who, when one or the other animal gives out, will see it go to the butcher or the workhouse with equal serenity. Poverty in the country is constantly embittered by a sense of caste inferiority, his power of inflicting which is to the wealthy employer a perpetual certificate of higher caste. The social depression of the cottager is the measure of the social elevation of the pseudo-squire. "As long as a man stays on the land, he can't call his soul his own," is an expression often heard among the poor. Authority is identified in the mind of the young peasant with the ὕβρις of his employer. Wherever he goes, his sympathies will ever be on the side of lawlessness, because law has always appeared to him as the power that supports oppression.

The desertion of the country by the smaller gentry has removed an influence that held this ὕβρις in check. Wherever a village contains a sprinkling of independent residents, the condition of the labouring class is better. They have more manly virtues, fewer servile vices. Publicity is an ægis

under which manhood thrives. This is part of the secret of the great employer's aversion to what he calls "little men," peasants who do not depend upon wages. They form a public opinion before which he is perfectly aware that his conduct and character are arraigned. Resident gentlefolk did more. They had the power of inflicting social punishment for offences no law could touch. A dirty action got round to "the house" and the offender found himself put in the corner in a way perfectly intelligible to his dependents as well as to himself. In most villages he is now irresponsible. Great farmers take no account of each other's dealings with the poor, except by uniting against any individual who may raise wages without the concurrence of the rest. For one farmer to express by word or manner any opinion whatever as to another's treatment of his men would be a grave infraction of agricultural etiquette.

It is a pity that the ideals of the middle-class have changed. It is not so long ago that it was the dream of an active man's life to spend the evening of his days in the country. He looks upon it now as the worst of exiles. Take the sons of the country clergy. Most of them embrace some active career. How many of those who realize a small competence return to spend it in the country? Perhaps one in a hundred. Look at the army and navy. Retired officers used to be familiar figures in our villages. Watering-places have swallowed them up. What becomes of the well-pensioned officials, a cultivated and superior class, whom India is perpetually returning in the prime of useful life to England?

They drift together in places like South Kensington or Cheltenham. Their culture produces no crop, and their superiority elevates nothing. And all the while rural England is perishing for the want of men like these, men capable of illuminating with unselfishness and lofty purpose the night of brutal materialism that has fallen like a pall upon our country villages. But they cannot face the sacrifice. They have always lived in the atmosphere of a single class, and they cannot draw breath outside it. The leaven refuses the coarse contact of the dough. The streams that should fertilize society at large are lost, just when their diffusion should be widest, in the central quicksand of Gentility.

I have said nothing of the country clergy. They are mostly what it is impossible that they should not mostly be. Take a man who has chosen the Church as a profession because he feels himself unequal to the rough jostle of the world. Put him down, utterly unsupported, in a village where his success depends entirely upon the good will of the junta of farmers who rule the parish. Nine times out of ten he becomes their man. And what becomes of the parish? This. Dissent decays. Everybody goes to church. The Sacrament is well attended. The choir includes all the young men. The churchwardens are the wealthiest men in the place. The admirable condition of the church makes a favourable impression upon archdeacons and rural deans. It is a model parish. But the publics drive a roaring trade. Drink rages among the women even more than among the men. Children are its foredoomed victims. Schooling is powerless against example.

Every one knows that the man who receives the Sacrament on Sunday may have been drunk on Saturday night, that he swears habitually like a trooper and that the money that should keep wife and children decent goes to some sneaking scoundrel who bets on commission. To talk of "an honest day's work" is to be archaic indeed. Shirking is systematized. Dishonesty inflicts no social stigma. The village leads a double life, and the rising generation at least sees no incongruity whatever in the fact. It is impossible to gauge the extent to which the moral sense of English rustics has been blunted by this hideous duplicity. As a class they have been treated like pariahs, and like all outcasts they have developed an esoteric code of morals with which the school and the Church have nothing whatever to do. Nor have they the shadow of a belief left that the conduct of "their betters" is guided by higher considerations than their own. Religion and Life are different things. The position was neatly summed up lately in a short dialogue between a master and a labourer who was leaving because, according to him, he had not been treated with "common Christianity." "Christianity!" quoth the master indignant, "Christianity! What has Christianity to do with it? If you want *Christianity*, there's the Church for you!" A few of the elder labourers still take a personal pride in their work, in their honesty and in their conduct. But they have no influence with the rest. The stream is too strong to be curbed. They are survivals of a state of things which has passed away, and few indeed will be their successors.

And no one realizes whither the stream is going. The parson has perhaps a vague idea that all is not well. He falls to work with oil and rag upon the soul-saving machine of which he is the engineer. All the parts work admirably. He is satisfied. The great people who come down for the shooting get their bows and their curtseys and compare the English peasant favourably with the Norman churl or the German boor they may have met in their travels. The infrequent families of middle-class people who live in the country take their opinions *en bloc* from the parson. But the country clergy are supporters of a state of things under which the Church thrives. "Camarinam ne moveas" is the motto of the profession.

"Alas, poor Yorick!" Had we but in the Church a few men of that unpopular type who, hearing of "a pitiful or an ungenerous proceeding," would say without more ado, "The man was a dirty fellow," there might still be a village reaction in favour of truth and honesty and manliness. But what could such a one do alone? and where are the men who should back him? They form the genteel society of watering-places and pleasure cities.

II

Farmers' Villages

THINGS are not as they should be in many of our country villages. So much is felt generally, though little is said by those most concerned. Labourers cannot talk upon paper, can hardly, indeed, make themselves intelligible orally, save to those already familiar with the local names and interests which form a basis of common comprehension among themselves. Publicans and shop-keepers are somewhat of the nature of spiders and by no means desirous of inviting the attention of the housemaid and her broom to the snug corners in which their toils are spread. The schoolmaster expresses no opinion which he does not hold in common with the school managers (see Lady Warwick's letter to *The Spectator* of May 5), the parson contributes his quota of silence to the "sacred calm that broods around," and is only audible outside his parish when ecclesiastical matters stir him to speech. He has his reasons for wishing that the dirty linen of the village should not be sent out. So have the farmers. So has the landlord. The population consists of two classes, the labourers—and the rest. The labourers cannot make themselves heard, the rest feel instinctively that if the conditions under which they thrive are to be maintained, publicity must be kept at bay. It is

very rarely that county papers are made the vehicle of complaint. Each village consumes its own smoke.

Yet the air is full of murmurings, and about Lady Day and Michaelmas awkward questions have a way of cropping up in the columns of the local Press. Always, however, in a general form. Some light might be thrown upon the question, "Why are the labourers leaving the land?" by an inquiry into the circumstances under which a particular parish has been depleted. But to apply the inductive method would offend agricultural subscribers. So the conundrum is propounded as *primâ facie* inexplicable. Why do they? Wages are better than they were. Cottages not much worse. Schooling is free. Churches are admirably kept up. The employers are the finest race of yeomen the world can show. That men should leave a healthy occupation, endeared to them by hereditary association and pursued among picturesque surroundings, for the vice and squalor of a town, seems rather like an epidemic infatuation than the result of sober and individual choice. Readers, please explain. Suggestions pour in. "Give them an interest in the scientific side of their work," writes a clerical dignitary. Reading rooms have their advocates. Allotments are extolled. Parish councils were the panacea of five years ago, but they are already as a tale that is told. I heard the other day, from one of his parishioners, of a vicar who gave it as his opinion that the discontent of the agricultural labouring poor was owing to their *eating too much meat.*

This was at any rate an attempt to get to the bottom of the matter. Diagnosis should precede

treatment. No particular view, however, seems to command anything like general assent. Nothing is done, and the exodus goes steadily on. No cottager willingly rears a son to the plough. A country girl's ambition is to marry a platelayer on the line, a factory hand, a working mason, anyone rather than a farm-labourer. Sergeant Kite finds a hiring fair the best of all fields for his operations. People who advertise for odd men, groom-gardeners, errand boys and the like, are literally overwhelmed with applications. The same "Wanted, a Carter," or a shepherd or a milker, stares you in the face in the local paper, week after week. "The land" is a *pis aller*. "The last o't, the warst o't" is to get work on a farm.

No one can tell where the shoe pinches but the wearer, says the proverb. Though my own twinges are hardly more than sympathetic, I have heard enough from hobblers to form a fair idea of where *they* think the mischief lies. What I am writing is not intended to prove that the state of things in farmers' villages is such as to justify a jacquerie, but merely that it does fairly account for the increasing distaste to country life among the labouring poor. The first thing is to realize what this state of things really is.

In reckoning up irritating items, I should be inclined to give a leading place to the manners of large employers. The relations between master and men are in a transition stage. The tradition of feudal dependence is continued in the voluntary respect still paid by cottagers to the "gentry" with whom they come into contact. As a sentimental

survival, this shadowy homage is the reverse of harmful. But it does not stand translating into terms of right and compulsion. Squires are disappearing and great farmers are taking their place. They are naturally indisposed to bate anything of the deference they consider due to their position as inheritors of squirearchical rights. But, as men of business, they are equally indisposed to admit the existence of customary claims upon themselves in the squirearchical character. Hence their attitude to their cottagers is both repellent and aggressive. Men are held at a distance by manner, not only that the social superiority of the master may be asserted, but that his pocket may be protected. There is something Napoleonic in the lofty bearing of the great agriculturist which I think can hardly be paralleled among English employers. Quite recently a labourer, who had been pronounced by the doctor unfit for his work, went up vainly on three successive days at times when he knew his employer to be at home, in order to get formal leave to move away. On the third day the master came out, mounted and rode slowly past the humiliated applicant, without even giving him a look. "I was for twelve years in the —th Regiment," said an old soldier, "and I was never once spoken to in the sort of way Mr—— speaks to me." It is difficult to exaggerate the bitterness produced by this *hauteur*. "They speaks to us as if we was dirt under their feet," is an expression often heard. It is hard to understand why agricultural labour should carry with it the stigma of social degradation. But that the position of labourers, at any rate in the south of

England, does approach that of the wearers of "blue canvas" in Mr Wells' story, is manifest as much in the assured authoritativeness of the parson as in the air of undoubting mastery with which any large farmer addresses any cottager.

One contributory cause may be found in the employment of women in the field. It is obviously to the advantage of the farmer that his men's wives should form a reserve of labour upon which he can draw on occasion and which it costs him nothing, meanwhile, to maintain. This is so much the case that it has come to be an implied condition in hiring-contracts that the wife should come out when wanted for haying or harvesting. If there is any difficulty about it, the master "makes himself nasty." "Won't turn out, won't she? Just you *make* her turn out," he says, and his will generally prevails. But as the difficulty of getting boys on a farm increases, the calls upon women become more urgent and more continuous. Hay and harvest make demands which raise little opposition. In bygone days, the master and his family took a personal share in the work at such times, and it still retains some vaguely traditional character of laborious festivity. It is not looked on in the same way as other field work. But when farms are short-handed (and the temptation to keep down the labour bill is strong) women are constantly in request. Every temporary exemption is grudged. Not long ago, a valuable field hand, who was also a young married woman, having in the latter capacity suffered more than one maternal disappointment, desired to give the expected baby a chance by staying for a

while at home. The master was ill-pleased. "She can hoe turnips if she can't do anything else, I suppose," he said to the husband. There was no conscious brutality in the words. He used his judgement exactly as he would have used it in deciding how long an (insured) cart-mare might be kept to work before foaling. But they paint the position vividly.

It is matter of common observation that a man's social position depends upon his wife's. This is true of classes as well as of individuals. The lofty bearing of the dwellers in the "Castelli," the hill villages round Rome, is attributed by Italians to the fact that the wives strictly confine themselves to domestic duties. The man toils in the sun, the woman, poorly fed and clad as she may be, is yet, in her degree, protected from coarsening labour with as much solicitude as a countess. A man is degraded if his wife is not to him more or less an *objet de luxe*. No allowance is made for this feeling in farmers' villages. The woman goes to work in the field and the treatment she receives in the field is the measure of the independence of her husband. Women, like men, must be kept up to the mark or they will not earn their wages. Loud objurgation is common enough. "He holload at her so as you might a heard un over a hundred acre field," was one woman's account of the rebuke incurred by another. But the rapier sometimes takes the place of the bludgeon. "Get up a pen for those women while you're about it, Jack," shouted a sarcastic employer to a man putting up hurdles for lambing ewes. "When they've got their job over, perhaps

they'll turn to and work." The condition of the two women close by was, of course, unmistakable.

Cases like these hardly constitute a grievance. Still, if a man does not resent his wife's being "spoken to," it is not surprising that his self-respect should be looked upon by his employer as *une quantité négligeable*. I have heard many stories of roughness of manner to women in the field, but never of a case of the master being brought to task by the husband. In schoolboy phrase, he has "established a funk." A clergyman told me the other day how, passing by a rickyard in his own parish, he heard one man loading another with foul abuse, and stopped, thinking it impossible that an assault should not immediately follow. But it was only a master "speaking to" a labourer, who hung his head and went on with his work without a word. Before "the land" can become popular with working men their right to civil treatment must be established.

Closely connected with this subject is that of the arbitrary authority to which employers lay claim. Few people realize to what extent the relations between master and man in the country are governed by the farmer's *stet pro ratione voluntas*. By agricultural usage, certain sorts of work are done at special rates, which ought, by rights, to be settled before starting. But a master who has the power of aweing his men will often leave the question of payment unsettled till the work is done. The men do not know what they are earning or what they will have to receive. Of course, with each day's work the difficulty of asking for an understanding

becomes greater. Women are often paid summarily "That's yours, Mrs Jones," and Mrs Jones knows better than to say that she thinks she has earned more. In one case, a party of labourers undertook to work through harvest and unfortunately had not courage to insist upon an agreement beforehand. Payment, though often begged for, was deferred till after Christmas, when it was made in a lump sum, less by half than what they believed themselves to have earned at the prevailing rate, without any account whatever. Men are absolutely helpless in such cases. They are taught in school a variety of forms by which the Divine Intervention in their troubles may be solicited, but they are left in total ignorance of how to invoke the Law. I should be sorry to be a schoolmaster in a country village suspected of giving instruction in such a subject.

Combination is, of course, possible. If the men chose to say as a body that they would not work except on fairer conditions, the master would yield. But there is no greater proof of the social depression of the English farm labourer than the fact that he has utterly lost belief in his fellows' hardihood and faithfulness. Bell-the-cat is foredoomed. A case of this sort comes to me from a clerical friend. The men on a farm agreed to ask together for a slight, but much wanted, rise of wages. A spokesman was chosen and spoke. The master looked at him in silence. Then a voice was heard from amongst the little crowd behind, "You're our master, and we'll leave it to you." The spokesman was dismissed on the spot. The rest went to their work as usual. I have known the same sort of thing happen when

women were the petitioners. The old feeling of fellowship with, and loyalty to, one another has been crushed out of existence. At a Parish Council election in a small village a working man was put up in the working interest. At a show of hands he received two votes. A person was found sufficiently desperate to demand a poll. At the ballot the same candidate received twenty-one votes, the highest number cast for one person being twenty-three. Nineteen men out of the twenty-one had not dared to hold up their hands in the presence of their masters. Every man for himself has become a fundamental axiom of labouring life. All influences tend in the same direction. The teaching in the school is practically in the hands of the clergyman, and the clergyman measures his success by the docility of his choir and the perfection of his church arrangements. To maintain these the great landholders *must* be conciliated. Submission is the lesson inculcated from the first day that the future labourer can toddle to school. The traditional answer of a pupil-teacher to a question as to the meaning of the text, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," represents the desired attitude of man to master. "It means that we should so regulate our conduct that Satan may be induced to treat us with leniency."

The Daily News has recently thrown a powerful search ray upon the country cottage. Most of the observations of their commissioner are fully borne out by what has come under my own notice. And yet I do not believe that the real secret of labouring discontent is to be found in the miseries he has put on

record. The long-suffering of the labourer is wonderful. He is the first to admit the difficulty of improvement and even to find excuses for a state of things which seems to a casual observer simply intolerable. Let him once be convinced that there is an honest wish to better his condition and no one will make larger allowance for the necessary difference between the will and the deed. What galls is the knowledge that his well-being comes last on the list of things to be considered, that the claims of live-stock take constant precedence of his own. A particular sort of callous cynicism on the part of the employer in the refusal of small requests having reference to the comfort of the labourer and his family, which has probably been developed by the protective instinct to which I have already alluded, is as common as it is irritating. A woman complains that the mortar has come out all round her window-frame, so that the wind is beyond the power of the usual rag-stopping to exclude. "Nothing like plenty of fresh air, Mrs Hicks." Another solicits pitifully, "If you'd only cast a look on the bit of a room yourself, sir. It is not fit to put a pig in." "H'm. I've seen many pigs in worse places than that." The grate and the hearth have fallen so utterly to pieces that the kettle will not stand. "Well, if you want to roast a leg of mutton *every day*, you'd better find another place to do it in." Men will put up with much rather than encounter a jeer to which they must not reply. Once his character for contemptuous arrogance is established, the great farmer may say truthfully enough to the landlord's agent, "I hear no complaints about the cottages."

Sometimes, however, a refusal is couched in straightforward language. "Something has given out in the roof, sir, so that we can see the stars through it as we lie in bed." "Well, *I* can't help it. We're having a good deal done up at the house and I'm not going to trouble the agent about *you*." It is obvious that an agent can only spend up to a certain limit on the repairs necessary on an estate. So much the more goes for the farmer's comfort, so much the less is left for the labourer's. Again there was no conscious brutality in this answer, which was given probably in perfect simplicity, and again, also, it vividly paints the position. Unluckily, the great farmer is the most *cossu*, the most carefully coddled person English society can show. He does not work bodily, he has no intellectual interests, his whole energies are divided between the conduct of his business and the realization of the personal luxury he thinks his due. And the contrast between what he considers absolutely necessary for himself and his family and what he thinks amply sufficient for the labourers in the way of material comfort, is too striking not to provoke comment. "They don't think us the same flesh and blood as themselves," says the cottager. And it is practically true.

Perhaps the next place on the lists of "Disgusts" (to use the word in its old meaning) should be given to the apparently intentional disappointment of that craving for domesticity which is one of the strongest instincts of the Anglo-Saxon. Englishmen will go through much in the hope of making themselves a home. But it seems to be of the essence of

our present agricultural system that the labourer's dwelling should be as little of a home as possible.

I have in my mind a group of several cottages, all in better condition than most in the same village. There is not an apple-tree among them, not a pig, not a fowl, the doors have no creepers, the walls no roses. There are two wells, one long ago choked up, the other periodically dry for want of deepening. Each consists of three rooms, two above, one below, with a small lean-to scullery attached. They will serve to illustrate my meaning.

In the first place, the absence of pigs and fowls shows that the occupants are forbidden to increase their comforts by almost the only means within reach of a country labourer; the state of the wells, that their convenience is little studied; the want of apple-trees, that for generations no inhabitant has thought it worth his while to plant and that no master has cared to do so; the bare walls, that successive housewives have taken little pride in the house. The limited sleeping accommodation (for the bedrooms are, of course, minute) suggests that when families are large and contain several grown-up members, ordinary ideas of decency must be habitually disregarded.

It is difficult to imagine a man resigning himself for life to the sort of existence cottages like these (and these are among the best) inevitably suggest. And it must be remembered that all hope of bettering his condition by his own exertions is denied him.

To a labouring family a pig means a great deal. He finds the father occupation and interest at

home along with that little touch of speculative anticipation which gives life a relish. To have known him on a footing of domestic intimacy is a liberal education to the growing lad who is to carry on the race of peasants. Buying, feeding, doctoring, killing, eating, selling, every single operation in which the pig is concerned is one of home and family interest and tends directly to that development of practical intelligence which the literary methods of the village school fail so lamentably to produce.

What the pig is to the man, the fowls are to the woman and the now almost universal prohibition to keep either has far-reaching effects. It leaves the cottager without employment for spare time. The man feels it in the evening, he goes to the public. The woman feels it in the day. Why should she not earn a bit of money in the field? It is to this question that it is the employer's interest to bring her and in this way the unhomeliness of the home does certainly make for his profit. But to get at the real secret of the great farmer's increasing dislike to whatever tends to the domesticity of the labourer is difficult. It possibly lies in the instinctive conviction that the love of home and the desire for independence naturally go together. A man who tries to improve his condition is making the first step towards becoming that monster in the eyes of the master, an independent labourer. Such a man has a good deal to overcome. I have known one who had a pretty talent for "clouting" shoes, but who could only interview his customers under shadow of night and received his twopence like the wages of iniquity. Steady hostility is shown to men who struggle to

raise themselves from the working class and careful pains are taken to close every opening through which their ambition might breathe. I do not say that the labourer's cottage is deliberately and of set purpose made unhomelike in order to keep him in what is called "his proper place," but that his having a comfortable home is not, and under present conditions, cannot be expected to be, an object with his employer.

Arising from the general depression of the home is a feeling rarely expressed in words, but none the less potent in producing discontent. It is the labourer's dissatisfaction at the way in which his children grow up. The subject of village schools is one I can only touch on. They are made the vehicles for communicating much crude religious instruction, they teach the three "R's" to a certain extent and they serve the further purpose of keeping children out of mischief for so many hours a day. But they do not profess to train and they cannot be said to educate. That is left to the home.

Now home education is practically imitation. By the time a lad is clear of school (twelve or thirteen) and goes to plough, his habits are already formed by anticipation on those of his father. He will, like him, by and by, spend his evenings at the beer-house. As everything is progressive, it is probable (and this is apparent pretty early) that he will belong more to the beer-house and less to the home, that his intelligence will be lower and his chance of rising less.

I have often been struck by the want of success which follows the sons of farm labourers when they

seek their fortunes in the world. Many enlist, but very few rise even to the modest rank of corporal. Some go "on the line" (railway) in various capacities, others to employment in towns. But they remain *manœuvres*, and nothing more. They do not carry away from their villages the mental vigour which might push them forward. The admitted inferiority of the rising generation of labourers, simply as labourers, is sometimes explained by saying that their interests are dispersed over a wider field than formerly by the more liberal teaching of the school. A ploughboy's mind is with Nansen in the "Fram," or agonizing with the garrison of Ladysmith, instead of automatically receiving and reducing to practice the lessons of his daily labour. I cannot say I think so. Nothing is more difficult than to excite any interest in the farming lad of to-day. Female domestic servants come largely from country villages. It is a general complaint that on entering service they are mostly incapable of doing the simplest household work without supervision and that only a small proportion ever learn. The reason is not far to seek. A couple of generations ago half the cottages in England were schools for the teaching of the domestic arts. These are no longer taught because they are no longer practised. Baking and brewing, cutting out and cutting down clothes, darning and fine-drawing, the care of poultry, the economical use of food, all these will soon be *artes perditæ*, as far as the cottage is concerned. Women used to be able to make their husbands' shirts. Give nine cottage women out of ten nowadays a couple of dozen yards of calico and they could no more

turn it into shirts than they could turn a lump of pig-iron into a dinner-knife. Cooking, even in its simplest form, is being supplanted by the use of tinned provisions. To boil potatoes and bacon, or to fry a bit of meat in a pan, is about as much as the housewife can do. Women of the type of 'Lisbeth Bede have been discouraged out of existence. The cottage woman of to-day has her pride, but it is not in the home. She slaves herself to save her girls from what she and they alike have learned to regard as degrading drudgery, the necessary work of a house. All she can save goes on their backs. "Look at them when they go out," she says, "you couldn't tell them from the Miss Swetstones themselves." But when they go to service they have learned next to nothing. Least of all, have they learnt to learn.

This is a direct result of the impoverishment of the home. Boys and girls alike, the farm labourer feels that his children are on the downward grade. I have heard a town mechanic tell how his father, an old farm hand, after working till he was incapable of further work, called his children together and made them *swear* that they and theirs would never again labour on the land. It sounds dramatic, but I have no reason to doubt its truth.

The public-house and the village shop contribute their pressure to the *peine forte et dure* under which the labourer is crushed. In London it takes about 400 souls to support a liquor-shop, in the country less than half that number. The ferocity of competition with which in the larger villages the prey (the labourer) is disputed among rival publicans may be imagined. All occasions, domestic or national, are

celebrated at the public-house. Wherever two or three are gathered together there is the publican in the midst of them. The first verse of Coleridge's most exquisite poem may be made absolutely applicable by the substitution of the one word "Drink" for "Love." Under healthy conditions the public-house is a natural and useful appurtenance of the village. It is folk-moot and news-exchange in one, the open window which oxygenates the close atmosphere of monotonous toil. But it has been swollen by the discouragement of its proper counterpoise, the home, into a predominance that throws village life entirely off its balance. The drink-seller is pressed by his landlord on one side, and by his rivals on the other. Simply to live, he must attract custom and consequently intensify competition. He must force the sale of liquor and of the liquor it pays him best to sell, by all means in his power. Spirits are increasingly drunk. Young girls are encouraged to come in; their presence is an incentive to young men to vie with each other in standing treat and whisky is what they are taught to demand. Touting has almost become picketing. I have been told of a case where the cottage of a young married couple was visited, night after night, by one of a publican's family, who plied the husband at the door with solicitations to "come over," backed up by offers to "stand" and threats of general ridicule and ill-will in case of refusal, all in the hearing of the young wife, shortly to become a mother. "He did not want to go," she said, pitifully enough. But, at last, he went. Old customers are the best of touts. They mostly have scores upon

which they pay as they can and to bring in an outsider is almost plenary absolution. Women who are "regulars" taunt others with meanness if they keep away. A girl who had never tasted liquor till her wedding day was fairly compelled to drink spirits when the occasion was being celebrated at the public. I need not dwell upon the sad result. Some families, father, mother and children pass their evenings regularly in the tap room. Fights and foul language are too much a matter of course even to excite gossip. This is a state of things against which the labourer is left to struggle as he can. Few have grit enough to resist. Sobriety without domesticity is all but impossible to a labouring man.

I have referred to the labourer as the natural prey of the publican. He is also the prey of the general shopkeeper. Want of space must excuse the over-condensation of what I have to say. Briefly, then, the case is this. The labourer has no money in hand to tide over illnesses, etc. The shop gives him credit and is paid "on account." Indebtedness is normal. The attempt to make wages go as far as possible in realizing domestic comfort ceases. There is no call for financial skill in adjusting outlay to income, and there is no opportunity for the whetting of the wits that comes of marketing. The wife must take what the shop gives her. Once in debt, she must deal with her creditor or take the consequences, possibly, in the last resort, be sold up. The family is fed and there is an end of it. The labourer lives largely on bread. I wish I could coin an epithet descriptive of the sour, leathery, clammy mass which comes to him under that sacred name.

Take expert opinion of any articles of food supplied to labourers by the "shop," in any half-dozen country villages taken at random in the South of England and compare quality and prices with what you pay yourself, say at the Army and Navy Stores. Twenty-five per cent. will not nearly represent the difference.

But the reader will say, "Pray what is the inspector of weights and measures about? Is it not his duty to see that honest food is sold?" Let such a one inquire how many villages each inspector has to look after. Let him realize the difficulties with which he has to contend. The Acts he works under seem to have been framed with the special view of protecting the dealer. To comply with their conditions is difficult enough. But the shopkeeper is thoroughly on his guard. I have known an inspector strive *for years* to bring to account men about whose systematic adulteration he, at least, had no doubt whatever. The fines imposed in the rare cases of conviction are not deterrent. They exasperate and they accentuate the desirability of precaution, nothing more. The labourer is practically unprotected in the matter of his food.

To take credit is, of course, optional, but here again pressure is brought to bear. It is notorious that the shopkeeper prefers booking a purchase. "Let it run on, Mrs Thorn, and settle after harvest." You won't know then what to do with your money. It is hard for a woman who comes down on Saturday night with the shillings in her hand to pay her weekly bill and the knowledge in her heart that the children have barely shoes to their feet, to refuse

the genial offer. Once the "book" and the payments "off the account" established, the whole custom of the family is secured. What ought to be consumed is known to an ounce and the absence of an entry denounces an infidelity. "My hens know better than to lay in the fields," says the grocer, and a truant finds the inevitable return so unpleasant that an escapade is rarely repeated. "Payments off" are ready money under another name. They do not fluctuate so much as the ready money takings of unattached custom. And the shopkeeper who has the village in his books is not under the necessity of keeping abreast with the next town in prices or quality. He can sell pretty well what he pleases.

If landowners chose to use their influence towards securing fair treatment for their men in the matter of food, they would succeed. The mere knowledge that one large farmer had declared that the inspector of weights and measures should have his assistance in carrying out the law would be enough. But they do not do so. Their attitude towards publican and grocer alike is one of benevolent neutrality. "It is none of my business," says Mr Swetstone, and his plea is generally accepted as a fair one.

But it does not do him justice. Every entanglement of the labourer is to the great farmer's advantage. He finds it hard to get men and he does not like to lose them. Drink inevitably produces debt and debt is the grapnel that anchors the labourer to his place. A man out of debt can take advantage of a general rise of wages. He gives his master notice, and the master must either make it

worth his while to stay or look out for another man. The labourer who is deep in the grocer's books can neither demand anything nor object to anything. He is broken of the vice of independence and his value as a working animal is increased. Labour at the best is only imperfectly fluid and finds its wage level with difficulty. It is the employer's easy art to dam it up in a corner, and the grocer and the publican are his best allies in doing so. "Live and let live" is his motto as regards the pair.

Ship-owners and merchant skippers have driven the English sailor from the sea. Landlords and great farmers are driving the English labourer from the land. To outsiders who live in country villages the wonder is not why many leave, but why any stay.

III

Service and Farm Service

FEW things are more noticeable than the revolution in the conditions of female domestic service which has accomplished itself within the last twenty or thirty years. The balance of need has shifted from the employed to the employer. Sarah-Jane that was, Edith-Maud that is, is mistress of the situation, of any situation it may suit her good pleasure to accept. She makes her bargain, she imposes the terms upon which she is willing to give a place a trial and she hangs the sword of a month's warning over the head of her employer by a very gossamer. Mistresses go softly like Alpine climbers under an impending avalanche and hardly dare speak above their breath lest the vibration of a word should bring about a domestic catastrophe. The great middle class has hardly yet got over its surprise at this inversion of relations which seemed as permanent as the law of gravitation itself. They still expostulate in the spirit of Balaam when his ass jibbed. But the *ci-devant* drudge is as frisky as a zebra and only answers with a loftier flourish of her heels.

The thing is too big to be taken in from a single point of view, least of all from the employers'. They are in the shadow it casts and they cannot see its bright side. It is certainly hard to explain. The

number of girls who have to depend for a livelihood upon marriage or work is larger than ever it was, husbands no easier to come by, emigration is inconsiderable, the type-writer and the Post Office tap a higher social stratum. Any increase in the class that can afford to keep one or more domestics is counterbalanced by the growth of personal luxury which demands for dress or food the money which might otherwise go to service.

The relative numbers of maids who want places and places which want maids seem unchanged. Yet this particular class of workers has gone up in the labour-market with a bound. What is the reason? One noticeable fact is that there has been no combination. Every servant maid is a detached unit fighting for her own hand. There is no trade union, no organization. The very societies which aim at the improvement of the conditions of service follow methods unacceptable to nine-tenths of those whom they desire to serve. The class is not the pet of any political party. It consists mostly of young and ignorant women, and every inch of ground it gains is won by hard fighting from the position defended by the great body of the well-to-do, people of education and resource, doing battle for their pockets and their autocracy. These disadvantages notwithstanding, maid-servants have secured within the last few years an increase of wages, an extension of privileges and a freedom from arbitrary restraint such as the discontent of generations has failed to gain for the country labourers from whom they mostly spring. And they have done it for themselves.

It is difficult to gauge the depth of the rising waters of change when the bottom is irregular. Let us take a sounding or two, and see if they confirm general observation. Here is a labouring woman of fifty. "When I went to service," she says, " I was about thirteen and I got £2. By the time I was eighteen, I'd been riz to £5. That was good money in them days. Now Edith, she went out at £5 and now she's twenty she won't look at less than £15 and she don't care to stop in one place more'n a year. Times is better for girls now." In this case, however, the mother started in service as a girl in a farm-house, the daughter in a town. But there seems no question whatever that wages in the last twenty years have risen generally by nearly half, in the case of "general servants" by much more Privileges have kept pace. A girl of seventeen stands on her rights, stipulates for meat so often a day, demands her weekly evening out and her Sunday afternoons, consents as a favour to wear cap and apron in the house, but absolutely denies her mistress's right to interfere with her dress outside. If she chooses to buy a new hat every month, that is her own affair. I was told the other day of a young servant who took away with her no less than eleven. A reproof, and "warning" follows, like a distorted echo. Changes are bewilderingly rapid. In half a dozen years a girl may have traversed twice as many families and through her acquaintances have become familiar with the interior of half a hundred. Her experience is formidable. Many mistresses are daunted by their maids. Her acceptance of a situation being generally only provisional, the friction of

pros and cons continues in her mind after installation and the heat it generates is by no means confined to herself. It she decides that a place is not worth her keeping, she will whip up a grievance as a cook does an egg and cover her retreat with the froth. It is seldom that a servant has a difficulty in replacing herself. The demand is so great that "characters" are hardly asked for. "I don't want any character at all. I am ready to give £20 a year and I want a woman who can cook decently for two people," was the almost tearful protest of a lady the other day in a Registry Office. Girls walk out of places as if they were changing hotels, with the perfect assurance that others are ready for them to walk into. The tables are turned upon the employer with a vengeance.

And not without justice. What employers are reaping now, that they have sown during the long years in which the word "slavey" was fairly descriptive of the female domestic. Without going back to the days of Mrs Brownrigg who "whipped two female 'prentices to death and hid them in the coal hole," or the more recent period of Miss Sally Brass, it is not too much to say that the life of an ordinary maid in many Christian households was until quite lately such as no human being could fairly be called on to endure. The chill of the cavern in which her evenings were spent, the long solitudes only interrupted by what Charles Lamb calls the "customary chiding" of a mistress who looked upon a servant as the regular *dérivatif* of her ill-temper, the cold scraps that passed as food, the systematic begrudging of all that Nature commands

Youth to seek—fresh air, space to use the limbs, society, self-culture (I mean that *culte de soi-même* which is the religion of the young and essential to the well-being of the race), all these deprivations together made up misery, and misery was pretty generally accepted by the employer as the natural lot of the employed. It is largely so accepted even in the present day. The wildest excesses in the way of cart-wheel hats and pointed shoes in which the modern *mädchen* may indulge weigh very little against the cold-hearted inhumanity of which her predecessors were the unpitied victims. The pendulum may swing still further before it reaches the limit of just reaction.

But it is with the causes of this singular upward movement that we have to do at present. Let us take a single case and try to follow it backwards.

Here stand side by side a brother and sister, twenty-five and twenty-two, the children of a farm labourer, both taught at the same school and reared in the same village. The young man has already received indelibly the characteristics of his class. He has risen to the top of the tree, is a carter, getting twelve shillings a week plus fifty shillings at Michaelmas, is married and has a couple of children, is of settled habits, the public of a night and a booze of "an orra time," is a ringer and belongs to the choir. A look at his face is enough to give roughly the measure of his intelligence. It is not degraded, but undeveloped and past the possibility of development. It is a good face too, only slack almost to idiocy. His speech hardly goes beyond the imperfect enunciation of such simple facts as come within

the range of his personal experience. Every idea that passes into his brain is sterilized on entrance. The question: "Would not a pair of these have bred?" is superfluous. Facts beget no conclusions in his mind. They wander about drearily and do not pair. His heaviness must not be confounded with blank ignorance. If the machinery of the mill is out of order, it matters little how much corn goes into the hopper. No flour will come out. Now the effect of the village school as managed by agricultural and clerical magnates is to prevent the machinery from grinding. Facts go in at lessons and facts come out at examinations and the less trace they bear of any mental process during the interval the more complete is the success. Texts are learned and repeated, but the fate of Mrs Lynn Linton's "Joshua Davidson" would inevitably befall any boy rash enough to use his personal reason in their application. Imagine a group of little rustics overheard discussing the Long Parliament with reference to the contumacy of the Parish Council and the autocracy of the farming Squirant! As for the parson, he is officially bound to believe that the conclusions of the Church as expounded by himself, are the very rightest that the human mind is capable of reaching. Why encourage an ignorant youngster to pull a watch to pieces out of curiosity about the principles of its construction? If he was going into the clock trade it would be a different thing. But as he is not and as it cannot be improved upon as a time-keeper and as the best thing that can possibly happen will be its being put together again *nearly* as well as before, the clergyman is naturally of opinion that it is

much better to leave it alone. "Argle-Bargle" gets no support from him. So the village lad grows up with the muscles of thought atrophied for want of early use. The real object of the voluntary village school is to prepare ruts along which the mind must hopelessly lumber through life. The "Method of St Sulpice," so much belauded in *The Church Times*, is the ideal of the earnest Anglican. Better no reasoning than wrong reasoning. Here stands the male product of the village school, heavy, submissive, torpid in beery discontent, a force whose value is to be expressed in terms of horse-power.

And here stands his sister. Frizzled, small-waisted, with amazing shoes and head-gear of the latest fashion, rings on her fingers and bangles on her wrists, a dress copied, and well copied, from a fashion-paper not a month old, perfectly cool and composed before the idea of being tackled on any conceivable subject and self-assertive to a degree that puts interrogation on its defence. I condense her from the reports of various lady interviewers. Yes, she started in service in the country. No getting on there, so as soon as she began to understand things, she got a place in town. That didn't suit her? "Oh yes, they were all right, but as near as Jews. So I and a fellow servant we went to another place together. And she fell out with the lady along of a hat as she'd just borrowed it to show the milliner what 'twas she wanted and I warn't going to let her go alone. So then I got in as second housemaid and a very good place it was and lots of company they saw; only the cook was missus. And a real bad un too! So then—Registry Offices! Oh yes,

I've seen a lot of 'em. I've had half-a-dozen ladies up at once, one after another, afore I could suit myself. *Ladies*, too! Notting Hill, now, I am. Getting £20 and a maid under me. Yes, that's pretty good and I've no complaint against them. Evenings out and dress as I please outside? Rather! But I'm thinking of Cheltenham or Leamington. Why? Well, there's no getting a *circle* in London. All on the hop. And one gets sick of the parks. And I like a bit of the country near where I live. And I've the style for a good place. Footman kept, you know. No. No housekeeper, thank you! Thinking of settling in life? Well, I might, later on. Savings? No, I *haven't*. My savings is Style. What's ten pound? I know my way about. No one isn't going to put her foot upon *me*, don't you think it. And I can tell 'em my mind, too, I promise you." There is no doubt of that, certainly. Petty insolences and arbitrary restrictions to which her brother would submit without so much as a look of protest have become almost unheard of as regards her and her class. And it is their own arm that has helped them.

Some may question the improvement. To them the drudge of the past may seem to belong to a higher type of character than the *insurgée* of the present. It may be so. One thing, however, we may take as certain. But for the "uppishness" of girls in service, girls in service would have remained what they were, the submissive serfs of women conscientiously convinced that their degradation was a law of Nature. Experience shows that superior classes are never the first to see the necessity for amelioration in the condition of their inferiors. But

they have learnt wisdom enough to accept reform when it is resolutely pressed upon them. The fortress of oppression in these days of publicity is but a paste-board castle. And the oppressor knows it. All that is wanted is the courage to resist with vehemence and outcry enough to take the battle out of the backyard into the street.

But what is it that gives the girls this courage, and why is it lacking in their brothers?

The only explanation I can see is this. The ambition of a village girl is artificially stimulated in a particular direction till it becomes practically irresistible. The ambition of a village lad is artificially repressed till it exists only in the form of hopeless discontent. I use the word "ambition," meaning the wish to share largely in the joys of life which accompanies every normal human being into the world. What special channel this wish may follow is of course determined by circumstances. The ambition of almost every village girl is directed to Dress by a convergent pressure almost impossible to resist.

Let anyone compare the place Dress takes in life now with that which it occupied fifty years ago. Look at the number and consequence of ladies' papers. Look at the mere bulk and volume of the advertising sheets which form the pinions of each wide-winged harpy. The penny fashion-paper goes everywhere. There is no peasant costume to limit the aspirations of a labourer's daughter. What a duchess wears, she wears, make and material apart. Her imagination is constantly excited by what she reads and what she sees. The illustrations to the

novelette which is her literature, the blazing posters in the market town, the kaleidoscopic splendours of the dresses of the farmers' families, all these feed her fancy with sheer stimulant. Young women in the educated classes are to a certain degree protected by the "intellectual hobbies" Mrs Ewing, of well-loved memory, was never tired of commending to her girlish public. For the village girl no such antidotes exist.

"Jumble sales" are in vogue and the farm-houses periodically flood the village with stained silk blouses, high-heeled tan shoes and cheap embroidered petticoats which pass into the wearing of the daughters of labourers on twelve shillings a week. When all are going the same way rivalries intensify the ardour of advance. Dress has become a religion and persecutes. Bitter are the jeers cast at Nonconformists. "It is sometimes difficult not to feel a *little* angry," said a grave, elderly woman, a lady, whose decent black was familiar in many cottages. "They giggle and nudge each other when they meet me and burst out laughing as soon as they have passed." She was speaking of well-dressed women of influence in her little country circle. The tyranny of Dress is the more nakedly manifest the lower you go to look for it. A young mother with four or five little children in a state of indescribable neglect must have a new jacket for Sundays or the neighbours would "make remarks." "Nobody," she says, "is wearing what I have." Imagine the effect of all this upon a girl's mind when the school turns her adrift. She goes to service because that is the only decent way to get new dresses and an opportu-

nity of wearing them in public. Her parents very rarely press her to go. But domesticity (the cult of the home) does not appeal to her. Looking at the great majority of labourers' cottages it would be strange if it did. The means to dress smartly and the right to display her splendours without arbitrary interference, these are the two points of her charter. She obtains them and with them the sense of that higher independence out of which it is impossible to contract without submersion of self-respect. She is no longer a "slavey." She can "call her soul her own." Good has come out of evil. The artificial exaggeration of a subsidiary instinct into a dominant passion has supplied the courage necessary to liberate a whole class from a state of subjugation fatal to social progress. That social progress has been made is undeniable. The old taunt, "There 'll be news o' they braws," has lost its sting. The over-dressed domestic of to-day is chaster and honester than the downcast drudge of fifty years ago. She is on the way to be more efficient. Long repressed Right is just now outpacing over-driven Duty, but the two will soon settle down into a steady travelling gait and Common Sense will hold the reins.

"Service" has been compelled to recognize and tolerate human rights. "Farm-service" is still subjugation. It yokes and goads and brutalizes. Men are still dismissed if their acquaintances do not please their masters. Their wives, though under no legal obligation to do so, must still go out to field labour or "give offence." Opposition in politics may involve "a march," as they have learnt to call a compulsory flitting. The Parish Council gives the

master abundant tests of submission. "I didn't know as he was agin' her," said a labourer of fifty-five, telling how he unadvisedly "held up his hand" for a lady who was a candidate for a seat in the village parliament. "But didn't he just give it to I arterwards!" "Still as a slave before his lord," represents the attitude of the farm hand in the presence of his employer. No sheep before her shearers was ever more dumb than the milkers and carters and ploughmen at the village meetings to which their masters may choose to summon them. They are cowed. It is to this that the race have come whom Froissart described as "le plus perilleux peuple qui soit au monde, et plus outrageux et orgueilleux." Pride is dead in their souls.

Is there no germ of independence within them that may still be fostered and vivified? Parish Councils were intended for this very purpose and Parish Councils have signally failed. As long as the Land is in the hands of a small class straitly banded together for the maintenance of their position and their authority, the condition of the labourers must remain practically one of serfdom. The monopoly of great farmers must be broken up before the dawn of hope can rise upon the English peasant. And great farmers are upheld by the whole Conservative party in England. They play the part of the "Undertakers" at the election of James I's second Parliament. As a class, they "undertake" that the vote of the villages shall be Conservative. Their power of paralysing anything like freedom of electoral choice in their dependents is a weapon in the hands of a political party. But even if Hope

were again to shine upon the peasant, is there anything left within him to which Hope could appeal?

Yes, deep in the heart of the country labourer there glimmers still a tiny spark from which we may yet rekindle the sacred fire of independence and self-reverence. That it exists at all is a miracle. It has gone on living through the generations of hopeless drudgery in which every high aspiration was squeezed by famine out of the soul of the farmers' serf, a survival from the days when an able-bodied Englishman, bred on and to the Land, might cherish the hope of one day calling a corner of it his own, at least as the tenant of a landlord without personal interest in the degradation of his dependents. It is the Love of the Land. I know nothing more touching than the rare expression of this feeling by men to whom one would naturally expect "the Land" to be much the same as "the Shirt" to a Jew-sweated seamstress in the East End. "A *beautiful* bit of land!" says an old labourer admiringly, as he watches the plough-share turn the rich furrow. He is on his way to the workhouse where his father died before him and where his son will follow him. That is what "the Land" has done for him. And he has never planted so much as a potato in a bit of ground from which he could not be ejected by a month's warning before Michaelmas. "Not much count that!" I said once, referring to a bit of bare, hilly down.

The man I spoke to almost resented my words. They were depreciatory to "the Land." "You just ought to see the way the sheep hang on to

it! Like leeches, they be, like leeches." He had never fed a sheep there nor owned a sheep in his life. But "the Land" was his Dulcinea and a word against Her was blasphemy. While this spark yet exists there is still hope that the labourer may be brought back to the land. But England is doing *nothing to keep it alive.*

What is it that stands between the labourer and the land? The farming interest. England is said to feed herself for sixty days in the year. The food for the other three hundred and five comes from abroad. Suppose great farms to be split up into small holdings and ten yeomen to take the place of each great "agriculturist." Let us assume production to be in consequence diminished to the extent of five days' food. Weigh such assumed loss against the gain to England in manhood and hope, in the *impulse upward* given to the whole race of country labourers. And so far from my supposition of resulting loss being borne out by the opinion of disinterested experts, exactly the reverse is the case. It is generally held that the gross output of the land would increase with the number of cultivators personally interested in increasing it. Bourneville is an extreme instance. If this is the case, England is paying and paying heavily for the privilege of maintaining the small class that stops the way to agricultural reform. Britannia is an old lady who keeps a poodle. What he costs her would keep a couple of children in food and clothes, he is of no possible use and he is intolerably in the way. But she cannot bear the idea of parting with poor dear Mouton!

The great farmer sits like an incubus on the chest of the labouring man. No breath can be drawn freely while that oppression remains. The possibilities of the rising generation are the most valuable asset in our national balance sheet and the children of the actual tillers of the soil ought to contribute to its value more largely than an equal number from any class in England. Health and strength and hardihood and the pride of honest independence should be theirs by inheritance. It is upon the degree to which her population may be infused with these qualities that the place of England among the nations must depend. Yet we go on allowing the parents of the boys who carry the hope of England to be driven by sheer hopelessness to drink and consequent degradation and the very first breathings of an independent spirit in themselves to be asphyxiated by the atmosphere that surrounds their very cradles.

And what is the character of the class to which we sacrifice them? Milton speaks of Mammon as "the least exalted spirit that fell." The words may save a lengthy characterization. Put any population you please under the control of men with no idea beyond that of their own material prosperity and the result may be predicted with absolute certainty. That population will be degraded. Look at the colonies of Spain and Portugal.

I shall be met with the retort that great agriculturists are good Churchmen, that the class produces a disproportionate number of churchwardens. It is true. Spain and Portugal were emi-

nently religious nations. But their support of the Church depends upon her non-interference between them and their labourers. To raise the labourer is to depress the farmer. And the farmer knows it.

7

IV

Without House or Home

WITHOUT going back to the Garden of Eden or the noble savage, we may fairly say that the first glimmers of authentic history show man to us in the double character of house-owner and husband. Οἶκον μὲν πρώτιστα, γυναῖκα τε.

A pair are married, singly to one another and jointly to a home. And this second marriage is the point of departure of all human progress. There is a world-wide difference between the savage who hangs on to the skirts of flying abundance and the man who regards "home" as a good *per se*, weighs it against flesh and peltry, and compels nature, by labour, to make up to him what he has lost by commuting his claims on the world at large for a particular nook of ground. It is with the home that civilization began and it is to the home that it permanently attaches. Nomadic races are incapable of rising high in the scale of humanity. A wandering tribe may develop a rude polity of its own, but for families and individuals who have lapsed from the higher level there is no hope save in return. Tramps and vagabonds have nothing in common with even the rudimentary civility of the gipsy camp. They are degraded in proportion to the completeness of the severance of the ties that connected them with

a fixed abode. The special virtues of home, neighbourliness, kindliness, the loyalty to kith and kin that lies at the bottom of all social life, these are necessarily left behind. Truth and honesty vanish. The effect of homelessness upon the moral being is something like what the cessation of atmospheric pressure might be upon the physical frame. The power of self-restraint goes. The fear of punishment is all that remains of the ethical constitution built up by centuries of progressive civilization.

Such cases show how easily humanity may revert to squalid barbarism, if the foundation of its ascent is disturbed. This foundation is Home, a settled abode susceptible of continuous improvement by the exertion of the same faculties which in their wider exercise maintain that continuous improvement of the State without which its continued existence is impossible. Any system that "unsettles" a class, endangers the social fabric to an extent commensurate with the numbers and importance of the class affected.

I speak of agricultural labourers and of the system which makes them the tenants-at-will of their employers.

The matter is not a light one. "I plead," says Dr Jessopp, "for what remains of that sturdy peasantry which were not so very long ago the very pith and marrow, the very backbone of a great people." What we are threatened with is then something of the nature of *Tabes dorsalis*, degeneration of the spinal marrow, the beginning of general national paralysis. The health of the entire body politic is bound up with that of the peasantry. Is that health

safe-guarded or is it left to the haphazard operation of laws to which the well-being of a parasitic microbe is of exactly as much importance as that of the entire organization on which it feeds?

Can England afford to let things drift any longer?

Much has been said lately of the way in which the country is drained of labourers by the towns. The fact is one which the census has put beyond dispute. But comparatively little notice has been taken of the extraordinary increase of inter-migration among labouring families. Take up any country paper before Michaelmas and look at the serried columns of advertisements by employers in want of farm labourers. Men marry young in the country. Roughly speaking, each advertisement means that two families are on the move. On October 11 (Old Michaelmas Day) the roads are almost blocked by wagons loaded with household stuff. Within the last few years village populations have been nearly changed over. Except a few aged people awaiting removal to the workhouse or the churchyard, hardly one person in a score dates back to a dozen years. Three cottages within sight of the room where I write have had thirteen tenants in the last eight. More or less, the same is the case everywhere.

Why do they move? Ask a farmer and he will tell you that they are a discontented lot, that there is no pleasing them, *that they like moving*. It is a queer taste. A farm wagon is not a pantechnicon van and the crazy belongings of a family on twelve shillings a week are not improved by transport. Flitting swallows up every farthing of ready money.

A new start means new debt. There is the shop to be compounded with already, probably the tally-man as well. The month that precedes a move is passed under the scowl of the master, the month that follows it is like the "breaking in" of a live foot to a new and ill-fitting boot. One would fancy that labourers would go on swallowing discomfort in a weak solution for a long time rather than face the concentrated misery of a change. But they are constantly shifting. And why? My own impression is that *malaise* is accumulative. "Us couldn't stand it no longer" is the general and comprehensive explanation. Farm service is a bed on which *rest* is impossible. All this chopping and changing is the uneasy tossing of the fever-patient who *con dar volta suo dolore scherma.*

Labouring families strike no root. Is this strange? The grip on the ground that makes a plant hard to pull up comes simply from the fact that it has sent out fibres all round in search of the food necessary to its healthy development. No root-run, no tenacity. Put the most ill-conditioned lout that ever carted dung into a hutch of his own, and an hour will not have gone by before he will be busy in improving it. The roof must be patched, the walls plastered, the path pebbled, an apple tree will come here, a plum tree there, this is evidently the corner for the pigsty and there a couple of boxes will make a place for the missus's hens to lay. He is curing his bacon and gathering his apples while he drives the first nail into the wall. He has begun to strike root.

And now watch him moving into a farmer's cot-

tage. He may plant or he may repair, there is not the slightest objection to his doing either. Only whatever he does will be to the master's profit, not his own. So he does—nothing. Potatoes limit his horticultural ambition. They are got up before Michaelmas, to which he is already looking forward as the probable term of his sojourn. To keep pigs or poultry is forbidden. The master shrewdly conjectures that their feed would come out of his pocket. There is nothing to attach him to his dwelling.

Agricultural science regards the labourer as a work-producing animal and values him for the quantity he can be made to yield. It is desirable that he should be to a certain degree intelligent. That level passed, intelligence diminishes his value. The same is the case with collies. A sheep-dog who "knows too much" is a dangerous possession. What we may call the essential human qualities are useless to the employer, who no more looks at the labourer with reference to his capabilities as a *man* than he looks at his Southdowns with any thought of the swiftness and activity of the undomesticated sheep. He wants work and wool and mutton. As far as the law will let him, he takes what steps he thinks best calculated to increase the production of these commodities. If human faculties valuable to the State are atrophied in the process, the State is to blame for not limiting the employer's power. It is idle to expect him to prefer the general welfare to his individual profit.

Am I calumniating that sacrosanct fetish, the British farmer? What conceivable right have we to

expect him to be different from the British needle-manufacturer, or the British match-maker or the British slop-seller? The various iniquities connected with these trades went on rejoicingly till they were partially checked by legislation. Improvement did not come from the inside. Nor is it likely to do so in this case.

Even from the master's point of view, some radical change would seem to be necessary. Complaints of deterioration in the quality of agricultural work come from all quarters. Mr Rider Haggard says that few of the younger men can be trusted to plough or thatch: Dr Jessopp that "we are losing all skilled labour alarmingly." Be that as it may, the etiolation of the country labourer in every character *but* that of workman is too manifest for denial.

> But these, though fed with careful dirt,
> Are neither green nor sappy.
> Half conscious of the garden squirt,
> The spindlings look unhappy.

Lord Tennyson's lines apply exactly. Farm labourers are "fed," they do not gather food for or feed themselves. Work, in which they have no personal interest, church, in the management of which they have no share, public-house, which is allowed to exercise a pressure almost equivalent to compulsion, these three are supposed to supply all that is necessary for their existence. Mentally stunted, morally stunted, in some cases even bodily stunted, by being deprived of all play for their natural faculties, it would be strange, if they were other-

wise than "unhappy!" A blind discontent drives them from place to place, dropping at every move some virtue of the home-dweller and acquiring in its place some characteristic of the tramp.

Stop the flow of sap in a branch at whatever point you will, you act in two directions. You deprive the tree of a part of its respiratory system and you kill the branch down to its last twig. A village that is not a living whole composed of interdependent homes, but merely a caravanserai for chance sojourners, has no vital connexion with the national life. And, in consequence, what we call "family" life hardly exists among its inhabitants. The domestic affections are bound up with the love of home, of village, of district, of the *Patria* which resumes in a single idea all these ascending obligations. I can hardly hope to make myself intelligible without illustrations. Here is one. A labouring couple lost sight of a son. There was no quarrel. He went and did not return. Long afterwards they heard of him by chance, married and settled for years in a neighbouring town. Someone asked him why he had never taken the trouble to come over. "Oh, Humpington ain't up to much," he said. The story came to me as an illustration of the deadly dullness of Humpington. The conduct of the *son* did not excite the slightest remark. Nothing seems to a labourer so unjust as to be called upon to contribute to the support of his aged parents. "That's just *discouraging* a man who's trying to live respectable," he says. That pleasant sight, a father and son walking together, is rare indeed in villages. Mothers are treated with little respect. The filial tie hardly

survives childhood. The word "neighbour" has almost ceased to have any meaning beyond that of local contiguity. The idea of reciprocal obligation it once contained has dropped out. Village rights have no interest for the migratory labourer. As soon expect a soldier to care for the patch of ground on which his tent is pitched. Parish Councils have come too late. Labouring Councillors get neither support nor sympathy from their fellows. How much interest is taken in politics the following half of a conversation, given, I believe, word for word, may show: "Got a vote?" "No, I haven't. Yes, I've been over a year in the place. Write to have my name put down! Now, do *you* think as I'm going to waste a penny stamp upon *that?*"

The Anti-Jacobin has prevailed. We are all "Needy Knife-grinders" now. The State is a conception too complex for the intelligence of the modern rustic to grasp. He recognizes no duty to his country, nor to his village, nor to his fellows. Self is all in all. Parental responsibility sits lightly upon him. He preaches by example, shirks his work as much as he can, does a bit of poaching, carries off a pocketful of wheat when he gets a chance, bets, swears, gets drunk with a conscience void of offence and leaves his children to the school and the street-corners. It is from them that the ranks of agricultural labour are recruited. Purpose is dead in them. "Us'll make it do for a bit," say the young couple as they look at their squalid cottage just vacated by a family of their own sort, and the first thing the children grasp is that it isn't worth while to "straightten things up," because father is looking out for

another place. Perhaps he gets it, perhaps he stays on "for a bit," but, stay or go, it comes to the same thing. He and his have no more "a home" than if they slept every night under a different hedge. It is a wretched existence and he feels that it is so. There is no present comfort and no future hope. Honest work brings no reward, skulking no disgrace. The man who works well without an eye upon him is jeered by his mates. And so it goes on. The master grumbles, the tension increases and by and by, for some apparently trivial cause, the labourer is off.

Whose fault is it all? Dr Jessopp says that "it has become an axiom that the worst man should get the same pay as the best," and that this takes the heart out of honest workers. This is true. Here is an instance of how the heart was taken out of one labourer, the best all-round worker I ever knew. Ploughing had been delayed and was going on under extreme pressure. His plough-tree broke. This meant that a team would be thrown out of work for a day. He got a bit of wood, shaped it himself, fitted it himself and was ready to take the field the next morning with the rest, having lost half his night's sleep. "And he," the master, "never said so much as thank you. That plough-tree lasted him two years, too." The man himself, his mates and his master felt equally that he had acted like a fool. And from this opinion not one farm labourer in a hundred will dissent. All that ennobles agricultural labour has perished from it. What is left is a dry, ugly, hard necessity, the primal curse without so much as a rag of sentiment to disguise its nakedness.

Tabes dorsalis has made appalling progress. The labourer is being sacrificed, body and soul, to the farmer. Is the State a gainer by this system? If so, *cadit quæstio.* If not, it is high time to interfere, effectually, between the two. And whatever is done should be of a nature to form a basis for the gradual building up of another system which would take the place of the old one without revolutionary shock.

The first step to be taken is one that contains the rest, as the egg contains the bird. Give each labouring family in agricultural districts a *home*. Let each cottager have the right of occupying his present cottage as long as he pays the rent, he and his sons after him. Let him be secure from eviction. Let him have exactly the same right to use his bit of land for pigs, or poultry or anything else he pleases as if he were its owner. Let him if he fails to pay his rent have fair compensation for improvements that have genuinely increased the renting value of the house he leaves. Cover England with nests in which the eggs of home virtues may be laid and hatched.

Objections will be many. It will be said that it is absolutely necessary that the cottages on a farm should be occupied by the men who till the farm. What is the farmer to do if the men who occupy the cottages refuse to work for him and refuse to make way for others? He will be ruined.

In some cases he will. But his ruin is not necessarily involved in the success of the scheme. If Mr A. offers a man as much for doing work that lies round his door as Mr B. offers him for doing similar work he has to walk a mile to reach, Mr A.

will (*cœteris paribus*) infallibly get the man. He is outbidding the other by 310 working days multiplied by two miles at a penny a mile or £2 11s. 8d. a year. If Mr A.'s service is undesirable to more than that extent, if the labourer would rather pay £2 11s. 8d. a year in extra work than serve Mr A., Mr B. will get him. All A. has to do is to consider what it is that makes his service undesirable *and alter it*. By doing so he will regain his natural advantage of position. If he prefers not to do so he must pay for his preference. Such a one will probably go down in the tussle.

England holds that married life would suffer if divorce were easier than it is. Temper would be perpetually dissolving unions that time would have cemented. Farmers and labourers are constantly divorcing one another and the farmer's temper is generally responsible. To bluster is a physical relief to blood always overheated by respectable excess and not tamed by bodily labour. It is an expensive luxury even now, but one for which a place is generally found in the agricultural budget. Under the suggested system it would be ruinously dear. Bullies would be automatically eliminated. The country would become a "School for Farmers," the lessons taught in which might enable the more rational to play for many years to come a valuable part in rural life. But it would also develop a class of men capable little by little of taking the large farmer's place and so bringing the labouring poor into direct touch with the national life of England.

The master's farm and his own "home" ought to be two battledores perpetually keeping the

labourers' intelligence on the move, each sending it back to the other with fresh impulsion. The "home" has been suppressed and the cottager's intelligence along with it. With its re-establishment the natural character of the peasant will revive, thrifty, shrewd, resourceful. The "bit of a place," with its pig, its poultry, its garden and the consequent utilization of everything in improving the comfort of the cottage family, is the normal school of economic agriculture. Its pupils are yeomen-farmers *in posse*. Not one labourer in a score could now get a living off twenty acres of land.

A sovereign is safe enough in the purse as long as silver is not to be had. The large farmer is, at present, master of the situation. There is no one to take his place. As soon as it is possible to get change for him in working farmers, twenty-acre-men, spade-cultivators and the like, changed he will be wherever the smaller currency is found more convenient. Incapacity is necessarily tolerated at present (look at the condition of many large farms!), but as soon as competition makes itself really felt, unfits will one by one disappear and the "land will give her increase" not only in corn and cattle but in the vigorous manhood which is the natural product of English soil.

"But the irremovable cottager will be too independent to work for wages. Each one will set up as 'a little man' on his own account." So the farmer will say.

One is reminded of the ladies on a desert island who maintained themselves handsomely by taking in each other's washing. Wages will necessarily

continue to be the main resource of the cottager until the land gradually absorbs him. No one can keep a family on a cottage and half a rood of garden. As for the "little man," the man with a genius for independence, who makes a livelihood by hauling stones, making "sprays," thatching ricks by the job, killing pigs and being general-utility man to the village, he will flourish to the exact limit of the natural demand for his services. And it is to the general advantage that he should. In the farmer's ideal village there is only room for two characters, himself and those in absolute dependence upon him. This impoverishes village life to an indescribable degree. One result of the labourer's irremovability will be the discovery of men of unsuspected natural endowment. Such men are trodden down at present to the dead level of a threshing floor. Nothing is rarer now than a labourer who is an "artist" in anything, were it only planting potatoes.

I have mentioned the right of keeping pigs and poultry as one that ought to be freely enjoyed by all cottagers. The principal objection is, I believe, that it would encourage the pilfering of corn from the farm. Another less openly urged is that the competition of the village would diminish the farmer's profits.

The first of these would probably for a time be justified by facts. That it can be seriously made is the strongest possible condemnation of the present system. If Arnold's principles were applied to labourers, the standard of honour in a village would be as high as in a public school. Put at Rugby a head master who was known to have no other object

than that of filling his own pockets and the tone of the school in a year would be no higher than that of a country village. The only possible way to raise the character of the labourer is to treat him like a man. As soon as he ceases to cower before the threat of eviction, as soon as he has learnt to take pride in his home and possessions, petty dishonesty will disappear of itself. Pilfering and shirking are the natural protest of helplessness against oppression.

England is said to send abroad annually some £8,000,000 in payment for bacon, fowls and eggs. The supply of all these commodities belongs really to *la petite industrie*. Pigs and hens turn scraps and odd minutes to £ s. d. The farmer may close his fields to gleaners in order to keep the first pickings for his flocks of fowls, and raise pigs by the hundred. Each costs him more to keep than it does the cottager. If every cottage had its pigsty the price of bacon would fall. England would be the gainer. Cottagers would incidentally get interest, occupation and better food. But the farmer would lose what is practically a monopoly. His interest prevails. It is the same everywhere.

Nothing is more painful to notice than the lack of the simplest sort of co-operation, I might almost say of neighbourly help, among people in the same village, in the same group of cottages. They are no more to one another than guests who occupy next-door rooms in an hotel. The idea of joint endeavour to ameliorate common circumstance is not even thought of. Yet in what else does civilization consist?

Rustic life is disintegrating, "slowly quickening

into lower forms." If nothing can be done to foster what vitality remains, by and by the vulture of associated capital will take possession of the carcase of what once was rural England. Great *haciendas* will be central to 20,000 acre lots and motor-cars will carry gangs of workmen hither and thither like platelayers on a railway. Farm and cottage will alike be things of the past. The detachment of labour from local association will be complete. And what will be the result upon the English character? It is still possible to do something. It will not be possible long.

V

The Tipster and his Trade

IS betting morally wrong? The Select Committee do not look upon it "in itself" as a crime. It seems a nut for casuists to crack. Attempts to establish an answer in the affirmative have met with but poor success. The Decalogue can only be compelled to condemn it by the unmerciful stretching of two or three commandments upon the rack of inference; the Golden Rule hits the Stock Exchange at least as hard as the Turf, besides flying straight in the face of the whole spirit of modern commerce. But be it right or be it wrong, it is quite certain that men will continue to offer sacrifices to Fortune and that the "lawfulness" of their doing so in any given way must ultimately depend upon its "convenience." If the goddess worshipped at this particular shrine is Ruin, masked under the attributes of Fortune; if the approaches to the temple are so beset by leprous hangers-on of the accredited priesthood that votaries can hardly return home without carrying with them the germs of loathsome disease; if the maintenance of the whole cult falls ultimately upon the shoulders of people who do not willingly support it and who get nothing from it but misery, if all this is demonstrable, it would be no more than reasonable to demand that its "immorality" should be held to be

constructively proved and that those who live by it should be regarded as outside the social pale. This is the very heart and kernel of the matter. If they are not so regarded, legislation is powerless.

It is hard to get the subject taken seriously. Humorous allowance is made for the manners and customs of what we accept as a borderland between legality and illegality. We are pretty well aware that the inhabitants "seek the beeves that make their broth" in either country. The tricks and counter-tricks of touts and trainers, the astuteness of a racing peer, or the profound dissimulation with which a great book-maker masks, until the last moment, the battery which is to scatter ruin among the unwary who have been tempted within range, it has all the attraction for an idle mood of the history of Reineke Fuchs. We look upon the betting world as Charles Lamb would have us look upon the Comedy of Congreve. In that atmosphere, morals are *de trop*. Our borderers are not to be judged by common laws. Do they live, cuckoowise, on the industry of honest people? We know it and smile indulgently. It used to be held that the heat of the sun was maintained by comets constantly falling into it. If fools will play the part of fuel to the sacred fire ministered to by the tipster and the tout, so much the worse for them. Their fate may serve as a corrective to folly. We are proud of the scale upon which our great national sport is maintained and extensive betting is a *sine quâ non* to its magnificence. After all, it takes all sorts to make a world. The police do quite enough in the way of repression to satisfy the national conscience.

So the man in the street. His eyes are opened every now and then for a moment, perhaps, by authoritative utterances like Mr Justice Grantham's recent denunciation of "cursed tipsters," to the character of the pressure brought to bear by systematized scoundrelism upon people incapable of protecting themselves. But he is not his brother's keeper. What is every one's business is no one's business. And so the meshes of the net cast over England grow closer and closer. For a long time it only aimed at the capture of sizable fishes. But the betting interest has learnt, like the railways, that the third class pays better than the first and the second together. And it is not only the towns that are worked. The agency system is exactly as well understood by the book-maker as it is by the Brummagem jeweller. If the book-your-bets "traveller" does not yet call for orders at the cottage door, he is only round the corner. He is to be heard of at the public. The trade of betting in all its branches is swelling as its lucrative character is more widely known. And country villages offer the only possible field for the expansion of its business.

And why not? Why should not the peasant and the mechanic have the same distraction to the weary monotony of their lives as the club-man in all his varieties? Two practical reasons dispose of the theoretical equality of the cases. The first is obvious. When the profit of a highly intelligent class depends upon the extent to which natural appetites can be stimulated among those very much their inferiors in intelligence, the latter are certain to suffer. The savage will barter his land for beads,

the slum-dweller will sell his very soul for drink. All the better for the trader and the slum-sucker, but decidedly the worse for their customers. And the appetite in this case is not only stimulated but depraved. Betting now, among the poor, means something perfectly different from what it did even fifty years ago. I will give an instance. I was told once with pride by an elderly man of the labouring class, a local preacher of exemplary character, that in the days of his strength he had backed himself for ten shillings to mow a particular field in a day and won his bet. I heard the other day of a man of the same class sending the same sum to an advertising tipster for two horses, i.e., for the names of any two horses that could be recommended as an investment for money to be put on through a commission agent. Betting is indigenous to English soil. It counts in the scanty flora of the grudgingly tolerated hedge-rows in which the dull ploughland of working life is famed. It is a "simple," useful for bringing folly-swollen swagger to a head, upon which the lancet of pecuniary loss can advantageously operate. But cultivated for profit as a crop it is every whit as deleterious as the poppy. And its victims are not Chinamen but Englishmen.

The second reason is even stronger. Everything connected with the particular sort of betting which it is the business of the tipster and the comm ion agent to push among the poor is more or of a debasing character. Its local centres lic- houses where landlords make profes ting men welcome for the sake of the cust ring. The two trades play into one nds.

Below a certain level in society betting *inevitably* implies increased drinking. The publican is an ally who must have his share. Winning means treating, losing a consolatory glass, probably at the expense of the generous betting man who stimulates enterprise by the narration of his own successes and is always good for "four-pennorth." *Ground baiting is thoroughly understood.* What the atmosphere of a betting public-house is I will not attempt to describe. Imagine the foul allusions of the lowest sporting paper expanded and expounded for the benefit of half-drunk rustics or mechanics by a man who has taken every degree the purlieus of the racecourse can confer, with no more restraint than is imposed by the presence of a landlord whose one wish is to stimulate the demand for drink.

We look down from a virtuous elevation upon countries in which the lottery or the *pari-mutuel* is a recognized institution. But neither can be charged with the two evils I have mentioned as inherent in betting as carried on among ourselves. It is no one's interest to thrust them down people's throats and they do not involve degrading association. It is quite possible to imagine a young couple hand locked in hand across a cradle, combining a *Terno*, with the numbers suggested by baby's first smile of recognition and the young mother's happy dream and the name of its patron saint; and they will pinch themselves to get the five lire that are to make baby's fortune and go down together, all three, to the little official shop where the all-important numbers are to be taken. There is no drink in the business and no foul talk and no neces-

sary association with what I may fairly call the vilest product of modern civilization, bar none, the reptile who gets his livelihood by tempting the poor to bet.

"I took a single captive," says Sterne. Let us follow, step by step, a single victim of the advertising tipster.

John Smith, 27, mechanic, wages 30s. a week, married, two children, ordinary type, not booky, not faddy, not political, not one of the few who can throw themselves into altruistic work. His time of life is one that craves for individual activity. He is unwittingly just at the critical period when work and wage have a hard tussle with aimless aspiration. But work and wage have powerful allies in wife and home. Chance tips the scale. As he comes out of the shop he sees a knot of his mates with their heads together over a small and grimy sheet of printed matter. He feels out of it somehow and exclusion stings. He chucks a half contemptuous jibe at them as he passes. "Gunpowder plot, eh? Going to blow up the works with that ha'porth o' dirt?" "Sixpennorth, then," says one. "Let's have a look," says Smith, curious. "I ain't going to split on your little games. Sixpence for that lot! It don't look cheap at the money." *The Ebor Observer* is certainly not a good sixpennorth as far as looks go. Smith turns over the couple of pages it contains. Names of races and horses lettered and numbered on some mysterious system. General advice in bold type not apparently to be unreservedly accepted without particular counsel by post or wire. "Gems" and "Special Gems," so much. Strict confidence to be

depended upon. No names handed on. "*That's* the way the money goes, pop goes the weasel," chants Smith with affected scorn, in reality somewhat impressed by his peep into another world. "Hello! What's this? Cowlthorpe!" The name of a horse in big letters catches his eye. "Why, that's the place my grandfather come from!" "Now if I'd got a tip straight out o' the sky like that," says one of the men, impressively, "I'd back it if it was my last shirt I sold to do it." "Back it then," says Smith; "you're welcome for me." And off he goes to his dinner. All the same it was odd, he thinks. *Haeret lateri.* "I'd put half a crown on Cowlthorpe if I knew how to do it." He does not know. The whole thing is a mystery into which initiation is indispensable. This is a necessary consequence of the present state of the law. Betting agents in the full practice of their business hardly know themselves the exact limits of their legal protection. They will not do business with a stranger. The confidence system is an integral part of the trade. Laws and by-laws are impotent to crush it, but they have succeeded to a certain extent in driving it underground and the entrance of its catacombs is guarded by sign and password. Smith turns to a mate he is chummy with in work hours. "Want to put a trifle on Cowlthorpe? Mr Roper's your man. 'The Rising Star' is one of his houses. You look in with me tonight." "Bring the money with me, I s'pose?" "Ay, and bring the police down on the house! Roper ain't such a fool as that. You come along with me and I'll make it all right." Smith doesn't much like it. "The Rising Star" is low and the

missus is all for respectability. Still—for once. The place is crammed with men of all classes from the clerk and the small tradesman to the hawker of boot-laces. Smith is dazed for a moment with the reek and the fume and the unrestrained clatter of excited voices. He is not strait-laced, but every second word rasps on his ear like a file on iron. The pair push their way to the bar and Smith pays. "Wait a bit," says his mate; "the landlord's son will be round in a minute. You offer him a glass for the good of the house." A young man of sporting aspect comes up and exchanges a glance of intelligence with the speaker. "Friend o' yours? Glad to see him. We shall have Roper here in a minute." Smith does the "proper thing" and has to do it again for self and partner before the great man appears. A genial, personable man, very well dressed, with the air of a superior who has looked in to enjoy himself among the good fellows he knows outside. His very presence is reassuring. He diffuses respectability. A word from a man like that seems as good as a licence. His talk, which dominates everything, is of course racing, general views with particular reticences strongly emphasized, but nothing like business. By and by he comes up, glass in hand, to where Smith is standing. "Glad to see you among us," he says heartily and insists on standing a drink. "Old place to-morrow then, Mr Roper?" asks Smith's mate. "That's the spot," says the great man cheerily. "Our friend Blueman happens to have a particular engagement at 12-30." As they go homeward Smith is enlightened on practical details. "You put down your name, and

the horse, and the event, and what you back him for, on a bit of paper with the money inside and go down Primrose Street at 12.30. You'll see him at the corner. Just put it into his hand as you pass. You'll find a hundred others on the same lay as likely as not. You fall in along of 'em and pass in your turn." "But how about it if I win?" asks Smith. "I don't want the money sent to my place The missus——" "Oh, don't you be afraid. You go up to him the day after the race and he'll hand over the coin. He'll know you right enough. There ain't no fools in his business. Or you just look in tomorrow and tell the landlord to take it for you. Roper 'll take his word that it's all right with you. All on honour here."

Two more four-pennorths, thinks Smith, as he goes home. He is rather late, sober enough but reeking of smoke and spirits. His little-practised imagination provides him with no more plausible excuse than, "Met an old friend." A conjugal difference inaugurates his debut as a racing speculator.

Cowlthorpe does not happen to win. Smith's mate condoles. "But whatever made you fancy a brute like that? In the *Observer?* Now, do you think as the *Observer's* likely to put you up to a good thing without paying for it? *Roper* would 'a told you better 'n that, if you'd asked him. It ain't nothing to him what you back. Now you just listen. You join with me and a couple of others and we'll send a sovereign for three of Mr Wrigley's horses for the Leger. It's going to be an outsider's race. Roper let out as much as that when he'd got a

drop aboard and was telling of the footman and butler as he used to keep when he owned a string o' nags his own self." "Who's Wrigley then?" asks Smith, ashamed of his ignorance. "Chap with office in Princes Street. Name on a brass plate on the door. See him sometimes in a carriage and pair, looking like a duke. He finds the information for the *Observer*. And he finds the money. Roper runs it, but he's got Wrigley at his back. And the money goes on with him. Ten years ago (very impressively) that man was lying on his belly behind a bush on the Downs, with the chance of a horsewhip across his shoulders if any of 'em twigged him. And you look at him now!" "Tout?" asks Smith, with a touch of disgust. "That's about the size of it. Employs 'em now, half over England. There ain't much goes on in a stable as Wrigley don't know. He's at the top o' things now and it pays him to be straight. He can't afford to send out a bad thing not among his 'specially recommended' uns. Now we'll put a pound apiece on his selection o' three. There'll be one of 'em at pretty long odds and that'll most likely be the winner. But if one o' the others wins that'll see us through with a pound or two to the good. And we'll get it on with Roper." Smith has a glass with his mate on the strength of their proposed partnership. Things look rosy. There's a pound or two to his name in the Post Office. He'll risk it.

Does he win? Does he lose? It makes little difference. His interests are transshipped henceforward from the good ship "Home" into a bark whose crew, captain, owners and charter-party are all

equally villainous. In a story-book he would be speedily ruined and left begging at a street corner, with the possibility of reform and a new start just glimpsed upon the road. No such luck. "Thou art to continue" is the sentence generally passed by Fate upon him and his like. Very likely his house is *not* broken up, his furniture is not sold, his wife and children never see the inside of the workhouse. He is degraded, that is all, and his descent is progressive. He is pinched for money now and grudges every penny spent upon the home. Sicknesses are doctor-starved and little family pleasures disappear. None of the winnings find their way into the home exchequer. The wife knows he bets and suffers the deadly anxiety of fear deferred. He has always the vision of a big *coup* which will set everything right. She has not even this delusive consolation. She sees into the squalid future, right on to the time when the children will learn how it is that father comes home so late and is so cross when he comes. By and by there will be the inevitable scene when father will have taken "a little too much" and the boys will know it—and the girls—and the street. And the fabric of social position she has built up for the children at the cost of infinite self-denial will be hopelessly in ruins. What is it all to him? What are his children's fortunes at the school, or his wife's discovery of an honest milkman or a chapel where the Gospel is really preached? How flat it all is! Sometimes, as the drink dies off him, his eyes open for a moment and he sees far behind him a vision of the green pastures he has left, the little pleasures to be had like wild flowers for the stooping down, the

baby's amazing pleasantries and the little lad's joy at the top "dada" brought home for him in his pocket, the good wife's cry of delight when he chanced to come home five minutes earlier than he was due, all gone. He is in the desert now and must wade through the hot sand till he reaches—what? A diamond ring like Mr Roper's, or Mr Wrigley's carriage and pair? Perhaps, it is a rare case, for the professional rarely comes from the ranks of honest work, perhaps he may learn to use his brains in the exploitation of the sordid *débris* of society with which he is surrounded. He may become a confederate, a man who is in the real know, who is admitted behind the scenes and gets his share of the plunder. Poor fellow! I wish him anything but that. Better the extremity of misery into which a victim can fall than his transformation into a tipster or a commission agent, or (for there is a lower depth still) into the jackal to either, the "good fellow" who brings men like a crimp to the press-gang and smooths the way to ruin, who is hail-fellow-well-met with wage-earning men, casually suggests their looking in for half an hour and hospitably stands a glass "just for the pleasure of seeing you amongst us." This is the man who "just for a joke, you know," takes Mr Roper's place at the corner of the street when the police, for decency's sake, find themselves compelled to take some notice of that gentleman's public receptions, or who conveys information as to the change of venue.

I have been speaking of men. To trace the effects of betting among women of the wage-earning class,

which is, we must remember, the great reservoir of England's strength, is a task almost too painful for a honest pen. Drink and unchastity almost inevitably follow in its train. Transpose recent high-life scandals into lower surroundings, with every suggestion of evil writ large and plain, and you will have a faint idea of the moral tone of a working man's home in which the wife has taken to following the example set her by her aristocratic sisters.

I have spoken principally of towns. But the plague is spreading into even the most countrified of country villages. It has its *untori** in every public house. The gold-mine of agricultural labour has not even yet been so thoroughly worked by the drink-seller and the grocer and the farmer and the "traveller" who induces the wife to buy refuse on credit, but that something is still left for the last Hodge-crushing machine to grind into profit. This machine is the combination of tipster and betting agent and the man who draws together little groups of working men and shows them how they can invest what money can be screwed out of the wife's anxious housekeeping and the children's scanty food, under his auspices, upon the horses recommended by the firm whose interest he represents.

Is the business considerable enough to enable him to keep up a handsome appearance? He will have no difficulty in obtaining social recognition. Like the old woman in Tennyson's half-forgotten verses who, "Feeding high and living soft, Grew plump and able-bodied, Until the grave churchwarden doffed, The parson smirked and nodded,"

* Plague-matter smearers.

he will be a *persona grata* in every estate of which the entire village constitution is built up.

This may serve to introduce the moral of what I have written. The recommendations of the Select Committee which have just been published are no doubt in the right direction. But repression up to a certain point only makes evil "tiller."* If fines are increased or multiplied it only means the necessary extension of the business they strike at to a degree that will allow for their payment and for the lubrication of a greater number of palms. The betting man is a very Proteus and no knot will bind him unless the cord is hauled on by Society. I am old enough and I have seen enough to be able to give without absurdity a word of solemn warning. England must do something to protect women, or woman will make England rue with a vengeance. Look at country villages. Drinking is already almost as rife (some people say more rife) among women than among men. Now women are *not* naturally disposed to drink. Hopelessness and degradation and misery have made their husbands drunkards and they have—God knows with what heart-break—allowed themselves to be dragged into the slough by the rope of conjugal influence and example. The effects of this are beginning already to be manifest in the children they rear. Women in towns have already taken to betting to an extent only realized by the police and the slum missionary. Women in country villages so far are free. They still look upon the tipster and the betting man as the natural enemies of the home. Let anyone imagine with what feelings a poor

* Come up in more stalks.

woman, who has got five shillings instead of ten from her husband on Friday nights and looks forward to a week of semi-starvation for herself and insufficient bread for the children for the next seven days in consequence, sees the cordial recognition given by the parson to the *respectable* parishioner who is so liberal to the church, the hearty greeting with which the farmers meet the good fellow who can give them the last news of the doings in the great stables, the deferential bows of the village tradesmen and the village publicans as their friend and ally goes along the street! What has been robbed from her and her children goes to swell his prosperity. "Is it *nothing* to you who pass by?" What possible hope is there that her husband should ever resist temptation backed by the whole respectability of the village? She has fallen low already. She will fall lower still if nothing is done to support her in resistance. And she will drag England with her.

I want to speak openly and I can hardly find decent words. Take a story. A Rabbi in old time was offered in a dream his choice of three sins, intoxication, incest, murder. He chose the first. The other two followed. If our respectable betting man was *known* to get the money that maintains his eminent respectability from keeping what is euphemistically known as a "disorderly house," I suppose (*pace* Mr Bernard Shaw, who I fancy thinks otherwise) that people in an ordinarily decent position would turn their backs upon him, would have no truck with him, as country people say. Parson, farmer, tradesmen, they all know that

wherever the betting man's influence prevails, drink and vice and crime and destitution spring up exactly as certainly as if he dibbled them in. Participation cannot be proved against them, moral responsibility weighs no more upon them than the fly on the cart-horse. And until Society unites to stamp out a social evil, no possible legislation will do it. Let Society leaders set an example to Society, each in the circle and in the measure of his influence, and betting, *as a business*, will disappear. Nothing more is wanted.

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VI

The Parson and his Flock

THE stonecutter who carved upon a headstone, "A virtuous woman is 5s. unto her husband," had sense on his side. "A crown" is an abstraction too vague to serve as a standard of value; "5s." gave a practical basis of appreciation. The same thing is true elsewhere. Electricity is a vast force that pervades the universe. But its cosmic character does not concern us in dealing with a particular electric installation. What does it cost and how much light does it give? That is the question. The nearest gas works give a measure of comparison that can be applied by a practical workman who knows no more of electricity in its larger sense than a telegraph boy.

Any attempt to estimate the value of the Church in the balance-sheet of England is generally regarded as a sort of impiety, like, for instance, the suggested test of the efficacy of prayer upon the odd or even imnates of a given hospital ward. The Church represents religion and religion is inestimable.

But the Church for our present purpose is a particular religious installation and "religion" is in no way impugned by an attempt to estimate her illuminating power, that is, her influence upon conduct. Her efficiency has to be judged of by her

success in making men better, just as the efficiency of any light whatever has to be judged of by the degree to which it makes objects more visible.

I have mentioned the balance-sheet of England. National conduct is one of the principal assets of a nation and is negotiable on the international exchange. Russia's misfortunes may be traced directly to her national corruption. Imperial France went to ruin in collision with Germany because her people were not honest enough themselves to be able to exact honesty from their rulers. It is the want of personal integrity among the Spanish people that has waterlogged the galleon of Spain. The Church is the official manufacturer of conduct. Education, the pulpit, ubiquity of local influence backed up by social pressure, the weight of corporate wealth, the vast advertisement afforded by churches and cathedrals in every centre of population, inherited association, unique opportunities of entrance within the guarded circle of family life at each principal crisis of existence, the whole of this enormous manufacturing plant is possessed or directed by the Church. Is her output satisfactory?

Feathers show which way the wind blows. Let us toss up a handful at random.

Company promoters are highly representative. Sharks feed largely on shark fry. The bulk of the unit gives an idea of the numbers of his species. Contractors are the cream of the mercantile class. A century and a half ago Voltaire was asked to tell a story of robbers. It was brief. *Il y avait une fois un Fermier-général.* Read "Contractor" and the story is up-to-date. To judge by what the bishops and

the Press have been saying lately, commerce is homogeneous. It is rotten all through. House dealing, horse dealing, picture dealing, ask anyone who has had an outsider's experience of these walks of life whether they do not *reek* of fraud. Adulteration is all but universal. Respectability in the shopkeeping class is a white sheet thrown over practices which infect the air employés have to breathe. Shopmen must lie or leave. Shopgirls who answer honestly questions put to them by Government inspectors are turned into the street. How capital treats labour let the London poor declare. Morality, even in the country, is a veneer. Intemperance hardly takes the trouble to walk straight at noonday. The rights of the poor are annexed by the rich with an effrontery of impudence that almost staggers belief. The Bishop of Salisbury has just called his laity to account in a letter which reads like a confession of failure. Debt, drink, impurity, gambling, extravagance, shifty, lying customs of trade or business, reciprocal failure of duty of servants and masters, on all these points the bishop feels apparently that the ordinary machinery of the Church is powerless to control the conduct of her lay members. Yet there is a church and a clergyman in every village of his diocese and the population is mostly rural and generally dependent upon landowners and landholders who are, almost without exception, not only churchmen but churchgoers.

It is a curious coincidence that the very next paragraph in the local newspaper to that condensing the bishop's protracted cry of despair, de-

scribed the "tremendous enthusiasm" with which the General of the Salvation Army was welcomed in one of the largest towns of his lordship's diocese. The Church possesses innumerable advantages which the "Army" does not. Why is it that "the common people" hear one gladly and are as coldly indifferent to the teaching of the other as if it came out of a gramophone?

The reason is this. The "common people" are ninety-five per cent of England. The clergy belong to the other five, the "gentry."

Sir Walter Scott talks of the "tableland of gentility." Let me call it, for short, the "plateau" and go to another poet for the "plain" that surrounds it. (Tennyson: *Palace of Art.*) Now the laws of the plateau forbid *familiarity* with the plain. The clergy, like the rest of the gentry, may go among the poor when business calls them. But they must not put off the plateau uniform. If they do, they are liable to be hanged like Major André, but by their own camp as deserters, not by the other as spies. This uniform is aloofness, the garb which keeps from contact the skin of the two classes.

Go among the poor as much as he may, the clergyman of the Church of England is nothing more than a diver who takes his atmosphere with him. That is the only way he can breathe when he has left his own element and his element is gentility.

Marriage may serve as a rough test. The clergy very rarely indeed marry among the poor, most rarely into the country labouring class which has been for centuries the special field of clerical activity. Either the degradation of this class is so

complete that its female members have lost altogether the attractions of "womanhood" in the higher sense of the word, or else there is between the rustic labouring poor and the country clergy a social barrier too high for even love to overleap. Such a barrier exists between the English and the native population in India. And the consequence is that our influence in India extends exactly as far as our power.

The Church goes into the rough and tumble fight between good and evil, hampered hand and foot with a complication of social cordage that would make a Samson or a Sandow powerless. God is no respecter of persons. A clergyman is compelled to be so and that in accordance with a scale of infinitely fine graduation. His energies are wasted in the solution of social problems. He has to perform operations of delicate spiritual surgery while his feet keep time among eggs to a jig piped by the Prince of the World. Let us take a few typical and common instances.

I borrow from one of Miss Lily Dougal's delightful novels a succinct statement of a case of common occurrence. New people, churchgoers, have taken a house just "too big for districting and too small for visiting." Its inmates match it. They are kindly folk, but obviously not on the plateau. The problem for solution is how to act so that they may have no cause whatever to complain of want of pastoral attention and at the same time may understand that the vicarage is not open to them socially; how to "ban" with one hand and welcome with the other.

Then there is the schoolmaster. Dr Jessopp has

invoked the sympathies of a wide and intelligent circle of readers for the deadly isolation and monotony of the life of a country clergyman. What is it compared with the existence of a country schoolmaster? The parson's sufferings are soothed by universal deference, his cloth protects him against the rudeness of the lower classes and is an acknowledged passport to the courtesies of the higher. His work is exactly as easy as he chooses to make it. The schoolmaster's work is hard, it galls him constantly to the raw. He cannot do his duty without exciting dislike. His education has raised him to a certain intellectual level and left him there. As cliff-climbers say, he is "crag-fast." It is easy enough for him to let himself drop down. The sporting farmer will be glad of his company over whisky and water; he can be a private and welcome guest to the leading publican. But ascent is impossible without help from above. His mind is stored with knowledge of no possible use to him except in connexion with a blackboard. Want of social usage makes him awkward, shy where he should be self-assertive, arrogant where complaisance seems a matter of course. All he wants is friendly association with people who know how to apply knowledge to the art of living. In a twelvemonth he would have learnt the trick (*il segreto per essere felice*) and his teaching would embody it. Suppose him to be made welcome by the vicar as a brother labourer, introduced as a friend to visitors at the vicarage, *treated* as a friend. It is unsupposable. Everybody knows that the social distinction between parson and schoolmaster is rigidly maintained.

Socially speaking, the schoolmaster is a pariah. Given this position, the problem is how to make the school a socially elevating influence in the village. It is one generally given up.

In many villages the "school-teacher" is a recurrent phenomenon. She is often a bright-faced creature, just at the age when a girl wants "mothering," ready to assimilate and reproduce all gracious social teaching. She is provided with respectable lodgings, kept up to her work and, socially, left to herself. The *highest* teaching is, of course, not only open to her, but pressed upon her. She has to be a regular attendant at the parson's numerous services. The Church is generous in her participation of the gifts of the Spirit. But she cannot say "what I have I give unto thee." She keeps back something more precious to her than what she gives. It is social position.

The Church has it in her power to make the teachers in her schools "ladies and gentlemen," to help to bring about at least by one step that happy consummation of culture when the highest qualities connoted by those two words shall be common to all classes. She uses her power in exactly the other direction, that of social exclusion. Here is a short story recently told in print by one divine of another, both names being given. It sums up what I have been trying to say.

A clergyman called upon a tradesman to urge him to a certain course in a religious crisis. The tradesman declined, with the expression of a polite hope to see his visitor again "as a friend." "When I call upon *friends*, I call upon gentlemen, not upon

tailors," said the representative of Him who "came to visit us in great humility." The clergy put on the whole armour of gentility in their intercourse with the plain. The plain-dwellers appear by their reception of the Salvation Army to be ready enough to be taken to the warm arms of Christianity made manifest in humanity. They do not enjoy being enfolded in the crustacean embrace of a lobster.

Notice the bearing of the average cleric in contact with people not manifestly of the plateau. Say in a third class carriage. His whole manner says, "I travel third class; but if you think I am a third class person you are very much mistaken." If accompanied by the ladies of his family, the attitude of the group is actively repellent. His wife is no more a snob than other people, but she has been drilled into the belief that to keep up her husband's position is the way in which she can best perform the wifely duty of being a "help-meet for him." Let any female, not in the garb of poverty which protects from misapprehension of social relations, but not bearing in her dress any distinctive manifestation of wealth, accost the wife of a clergyman. She *bristles* with mistrust. The fear of being compromised socially paralyses all natural and human feeling. No one now beyond middle life can fail to have noticed the change that within his memory has passed over clerical manner. The old genial bonhomie of the man who felt himself to represent a message of goodwill to all mankind, has been replaced by a bearing modelled upon that of the late Cardinal Manning, "the cast-iron Cardinal." It may probably be assumed to enhance the value of

special clerical caresses, but it is a panoply that isolates its wearer from his brothers at large. I once had an interview with an eminent clergyman. It was not of a contentious sort, but I thought afterwards of the story in the *Morte d'Arthur* of how Sir Percival came across a lion and a dragon engaged in a deadly struggle and instinctively took the lion's side, as the "most kindly" beast, the one most akin to man. Had I ever chanced to see that bishop grappling with a burglar, I suppose I should have gone to his lordship's aid, but I should have felt none the less that the burglar was the "more *kindly*" of the two.

How is it that this attitude towards nineteen-twentieths of humanity has become the characteristic of the clergy at large, instead of being, as it was formerly, the unamiable peculiarity of a few morose or pharisaical individuals?

The explanation I think is this. Up to comparatively recent times the Church possessed, if not the fact, at least the traditional prestige of actual authority. Her power to punish entitled her to the respect a soldier shows his officers. Now the garb of real authority can be very lightly worn. The parson's affability sprang naturally from his consciousness of an unquestioned right to rule. Public opinion has removed this right and the old affability has gone with it.

There is another reason. The Church has lost all pretence of exclusive *expertise*. The knowledge possessed by the clergy, and supposed to have been attained by a long and expensive course of study, was once believed to give them the same compe-

tence in the navigation of the spiritual ship as is possessed by mariners is possession of a master's certificate. The crew could do no more than haul at the ropes and take their trick at the wheel. All this is exploded. Charts are thumbed over in the fo'c'sle and the cook can take an altitude as well as the skipper. The officers are no longer entitled to the respect naturally shown to knowledge and authority. It is perhaps excusable that they should cling with double determination to the privileges of the quarter-deck and the society of the first class passengers. But do they earn the immense pay they receive?

Immense pay! "A miserable pittance," not more than one hundred and twenty pounds a year in most cases! Well, compare that with the Continent. Go a step further, compare that with the wage paid to a farm labourer. The very parson who bewails his poverty in the papers will tell you that a carter with fifteen shillings a week is very well off. Compare the work they do. The carter nine hours a day, no holidays, out of doors fine weather or foul. The parson *five*, no supervision, except for his walk to church no exposure. The pay one shilling and sixpence an hour to the cleric, three pence halfpenny to the ploughman. Is not the clergyman's what they call "a soft job?"

But he has to keep up "the position of a gentleman." He lives on the plateau and he must confirm to its sumptuary laws. *Where is the necessity?* Suppose our clerical budget of one hundred andtwenty pounds to be apportioned in this way; twenty pounds insurance, twelve pounds poor, ten pounds

house repairs, eight pounds extras. The seventy pounds *left* make him nearly twice as rich as his neighbour in actual money, *plus* leisure. The parson when he takes orders knows perfectly well what his chances are. The Church may possibly give him wealth, will, probably, give him what he calls "only a pittance." If he is a man, he will accept it without unmanly wailing, will take his poverty as a gift from God. He should be contented to live like a labouring man and he has time to teach his children.

Stop. There is the rub. How about the future of his children? I say that he should educate his children to be the leaven of the labouring class. What is the good of shoving a responsibility a generation on? If your children are on the plateau, your grandchildren will be of the plain. D'Urbervilles are plenty in country villages. It is better to step down in your strength than fall in your weakness. "Not in *our* time, Lord!" That is what it comes to.

The country clergy have hitherto taken the degradation of the country labourer as a matter of course. They have ministered to his soul, they have dribbled doles to his body, but they have left his social position alone. The first poor country parson who deliberately brings up his own boys to be country labourers will put a screw-jack under the whole class. All England will see that the position will have to be raised until it is compatible with self-respect. "Your pride, your darling pride, make *that* your sacrifice." A peasant priesthood, marrying among the poor and elevating by the *possibility* of election to the position of the parson's wife the whole standard of the present village maiden, feed-

ing the ranks of labour with sturdy rustics brought up in a healthy home atmosphere, with housemaids who sweep floors "as by God's laws" and think of something beyond penny fashion papers, if the Church could give England *this*, she would be doing a work that might save England at the same time that it propped her own trembling fabric.

The marks of decadence upon her now are clear for all eyes to see. Her position was tersely summed up the other day by the Vicar of Windsor, reported in *The Daily Mail*, "The worship of God needs money." To live righteously costs much. But it is not money that it costs. "The worship of God" as understood by the Church is a matter of £ s. d. "The worship of God needs money!" The Church cries it aloud in every village. Altar furniture, organs, choirs in surplices, flowers *bought* for the decoration of the sanctuary, *anything* to induce the people to come and "worship God." And when every church is a model of ecclesiastical completeness, a bishop complains that his laity are on the path of perdition. The *culte* of the quarter-deck is carried to such a point that the navigation of the national ship is seriously impeded. An A.B. is of small account compared with a "swab" who salutes the sacred planks in a way that flatters the vanity of the genteel promenaders. Conduct is nothing compared with worship. Let us try to get to the bed rock. What would be the result upon the supply of candidates for ordination, supposing the Church no longer to offer a genteel social position as an advantage inseparably attached to Holy Orders? It would fall off. To lower class candidates social pro-

motion is the principal inducement. Those already on the plateau would decline to enter a profession not *necessarily* that of "a gentleman." If the Apostles and their early followers had been men of this sort, Christianity would have died in its cradle.

The Church, possessing the churches and cathedrals, has almost the monopoly of what she calls "worship." Her success in obtaining worshippers is the justification she offers to England of her cost to the State. She attracts them by her "pomp of worship." And this needs money. It comes from the genteel classes who support the Church because she supports them by her practice and example in an insolence of exclusiveness which is making England hateful to the best of the English poor. But she cannot afford to alienate them by austerity. So she makes a compromise. Only worship—"we do the rest" (as the Kodak Co. says).

It is amazing that England has not yet generally applied the words of Bishop Heber's missionary hymn to her own official worship. "The heathen in their blindness bow down to wood and stone." The material church in nearly every village is an idol of wood and stone, bedecked with pagan frippery and worshipped with pagan pomp and pagan ritual. That it is worshipped from the inside and not the out does not constitute an essential difference. The church is no longer a meeting house for prayerful Christians. It is a temple for the ritual worship which has taken the place of the Christian life. The sacerdotal pretensions of the English Church have gone up exactly in the ratio that her claims to legal authority, to exclusive knowledge and to influence

upon national conduct have gone down. They are unreasonable because they rest professedly not upon reason but upon faith. Faith to an individual may be the highest motive of conduct. It proves itself in his heart. To a nation it can never be anything more than a mischievous cry. If it is maintained nationally it becomes persecution. If it is (as in England) acknowledged officially without any national attempt to act it out in conduct, it infects with unreality the whole religious thought of the people. It is upon official faith in her sacerdotal pretentions that the English Church now rests. Official support removed, she would fall to pieces. History is blazed at intervals with revivals of early Christian practice. St Francis, Lollardism, Lutheranism, Puritanism, Port Royal in France (when *le christianisme reparut austère et grave; le monde revit avec étonnement la face pâle du Crucifié*), the Wesleys at the close of the eighteenth century, the Salvation Army of to-day, all mark the emergence of the original type. Self denial is one of its notes. I have asked what would be the effect upon the supply of candidates for orders if the Church ceased to offer the inducement of social position. I ask now what would be the effect of her demanding from her future *officers* the same renunciation that the Salvation Army requires from its *rank and file*. The men give up liquor and tobacco. The women also give up "dress." A paper the other day described a garden party given by the Bishop of Winchester to his clergy. A casual observer, said the reporter, might have taken it for a garden party at Marlborough House. The dresses were just as fashionable if not

quite so costly. These ladies naturally dress for the world they belong to, for the plateau, not for the plain. But village girls have the faculty of imitation quite as strongly as their betters. Is there anything more comical than to hear a clergyman in apparently robust health, who smokes like a chimney, recommending to the young men of his parish the teetotalism which "the doctor" does not allow him to practise? "They do take we for fools," observe the listeners, grinning to one another. But the parson is quite unconscious of the humour of the position.

Would the vocation of the average candidate for orders survive such a self-denying ordinance as this? I wish some bishop would be sporting enough to try.

This article has already exceeded the limits I proposed to myself on beginning it. Let me sum up shortly.

Some nineteen-twentieths of the English people are officially supplied with religion by a small fraction of the genteel class which forms the other twentieth. This fraction is distinct in habits of life and of thought from the mass of the population, from which it is kept apart by caste restrictions as severe as those which govern the relations of Brahmin and Sudra. The form of religion it offers mechanically is practically obsolete and is only accepted by the force of old habit. It remains as a distinct element in English life, not contributing at all, or in the very slightest degree, to the formation of conduct, with which it is hardly associated in general thought. This view, if accepted, would

naturally lead to the question of how far a sweeping change of agency might render religion more efficacious in raising the national character which appears now to be distinctly decadent. The Salvation Army gives us the spectacle of an agency which aims directly at the improvement of conduct. It demands renunciation and reformation and it offers in return the love of God made manifest in the humility and the love which inspire its followers. The issue is a plain one, gentility, sacerdotalism and the "pomp of worship" on one side, *that* on the other, the Plain against the Plateau. To a casual observer, it looks as if the Church had better come down, while she can.

VII

Under which King?

A parson's study in the country. Low bookshelves, classics and modern literature, a reading desk with an open folio. A few old engravings upon the walls, the photograph of a college, the portrait of a bishop. A well-worn writing table, piled with books and papers. The window is open and roses peep in. Between the branches of chestnuts in flower is seen a village church, bedded like an old ivory crucifix upon the cloth of gold of a May meadow. It strikes the eye with a sense of exquisite beauty unmarred by a single jarring detail.

The parson stands by the table holding a bundle of yellowish papers. He is a man of forty-five, black hair grizzling, kindly grey-blue eyes, solid rough-hewn face with close set lips suggestive of much humorous reticence. A manly man. He wears an old ragged grey jacket over clerical waistcoat and trousers, shiny and all but threadbare with long and careful use. But the impression left by his personality is that of exquisite cleanliness. He unties the packet and lets some dozens of folded papers drop upon the table. One seems to attract his attention. He takes it up. It is a sermon, docketed with text and date.

PARSON. Well, I must have been an intolerable curate! And the vanity of the creature! If this one has not got "bravo" faintly pencilled in the corner in imitation of poor Yorick! What is it? Ah, yes. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." That might do. But altering and bringing up to date is more trouble than rewriting. Still it is a wholesome exercise, if it is a little humiliating. [*He glances at the contents.*] He was a fiery fellow that! I have changed a good deal in twenty years. Advanced? Well, so we must hope, but I wrote a nice hand in those days. Neat, scholarly. The habit of writing Greek, I suppose. I wish I had kept it up. [*Takes up a pen and writes.*] ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν. Not so bad. What put that in my head, I wonder. Poor Antigone! Her back against the unwritten, unyielding law of Right. Yes, a case of conscience in old days brought out the man. He stood up at the stake or he cowered like a cur. [*He draws himself up with his chest out, then slowly stoops again over the papers.*] No, thank God that things are easier now, that I have not to choose whom I will serve in the face of fire and faggot. I don't know. Moral pressure one may possibly defy, but actual bodily torture—. Well, perhaps all martyrs felt like me till the pinch came. Shall I use Antigone as an illustration? A little above their heads, I fear. [*He moves slowly to the window and touches a rose caressingly, his eyes fixed on the church.*] How pretty it all looks! I think what little actual restoration we did was done reverently. The less you do the more it costs, it seems! But I would have no work but the best. I

would rather have shored up the east wall with baulks of timber from the outside, as old Jackson suggested, than scamp a particle. They have all been good about it, very good. Eight hundred pounds from a place like this! It has cost me some little self-repression to keep on such admirable terms with them all. But it is worth it. The village may be proud of its lovely church. And it *is!* That missing bell! We must wait for that. I have a great mind, on my own account—. No! no debt. *Vade retro, Sathanas.* I felt a little ashamed to confess that my estimate had been exceeded. That carving to match the old screen was not *strictly* necessary. They took it very well. It is very near perfection. All *good,* at any rate. I should like to have had the full peal for Whitsun. That bell at Carson's was an opportunity—lost. It can't be helped. I am not going to ask them for another £50. And I have exactly seven and sixpence to live on for the next week! The zeal of the House of the Lord has very nearly eaten me up! [*He laughs with amused appreciation of the absurdity of the position.*] Come in.

A maid enters with a note.

MAID. Mr Puddock's compliments, sir. The man didn't wait. [*Maid goes out.*]

The PARSON *opens it and reads.*

"My dear Mullion," (Well, ah, u-m-m, perhaps—. But a parson has no business with pride.)

"My dear Mullion,—We mustn't keep the village waiting for its bell. I enclose a cheque for £50.

"Sincerely yours,

"The Grange." "J. PUDDOCK.

PARSON. Fifty pounds! That is generous indeed. I will not lose to-day's post. Very kind! Just when I thought the liberality of the committee had been squeezed to the last drop, and I'm afraid Puddock has not had a very good season either, so far. Only three wins out of the Grange stables and those small events. However [*cheerfully*] we outsiders only see the *dessus des cartes*. Perhaps—[*he smiles*]. At any rate I hope this act of generosity will bring him a blessing [*he hesitates a moment and mechanically substitutes another word*] will bring him luck. I must write and thank him. [*He still stands at the window, his lips curved in a slow smile of exquisite enjoyment.*]

It was not like that when I came here. A very few years more and things would have been too far gone. It is lucky I came. It is lucky I found the leading members of my flock not only ready to appreciate my wish for peace and unity among ourselves, but ready also to give harmonious assistance in a long neglected work of religion. And poor old Crossgrain found them all so utterly impracticable. Well, the church is what it should be. It is what its builders and those who first worshipped within its walls would have joyed to see it. It is "beautiful exceedingly."

[*He very slightly advances his hand, palm uppermost and whispers with deep reverence*] "Take it, O Lord, and let it be, As something I have done for Thee."

Well! [*with a rapid change of manner to cheery activity*] Now for my letter to Carsons and a line to that brick, Puddock, and then for my sermon.

[*He sits down and writes rapidly.* Just as he has

folded and closed his letters there is a tap at the door.]

MAID. Please, sir, it's Tom Pargiter to see you, sir. He've got a place away from here, sir.

PARSON. I'll come in a moment. Stay, Jane. Bring him in here, and, Jane, ask old Enoch Judd to step over with this to the Grange. He can put the other in the post as he goes by. [*Maid goes out.*] So Tom's got a place! Well, I'm uncommonly glad of it. Village life doesn't offer much to an intelligent lad. And unless he stays from very high motives, it isn't likely to do him any good. It isn't morally healthy. No. And as things are now, I can hardly see how it is to be made so. Tom is a good lad, a very good lad. I shall miss him, but—come in, man! So you're going to leave us, Tom! a good place, I hope.

[TOM *comes in with a bow and a scrape of the foot, and stands carefully before the door, his black bowler hat held in both hands. He is in his Sunday best, a long-limbed, clear-faced lad of twenty or twenty-one, with good brow and honest intelligent eyes. His attitude tells of the plough.*]

TOM. Well, sir, I think it's a chance, as you may say. And it ain't far, neither. And the money's pretty good to begin wi'.

PARSON. That's well. You're getting eleven shillings now, aren't you? Mr Jackson won't like losing his best under-carter. And I don't much like saying good-bye to my best Bible Class boy, Tom. Boy! Why, you're a man and an able-bodied one, too. But you were a boy when I came and I used to have

you up before Confirmation. And how many collects do you know now, Tom?

TOM. Nigh about the lot on 'em, sir, I think. You start me anywhere in 'em, sir, you telling me whereabouts 'tis it comes in the Prayer Book, Easter or Christmas, or where, and I don't think as you'll find me much out, sir.

PARSON. That's right, Tom. They're like the stones in an old wall, each filling its place. A good stone anywhere, but best in its own place. You have a rare memory, Tom. And how many texts do you know by heart ?

TOM. Well, sir, I've pretty nigh lost count. Going on for a couple o' hundred or summat thereabouts.

PARSON. I needn't ask about your catechism, Tom. And now comes the time for putting all this into practice in a new place and among new people. Well, this is the last time, I suppose. You shall say your "Duty to your Neighbour" to me. And then, before you go, we'll kneel down together and ask God's blessing on your start in life.

[TOM *repeats his "Duty to his Neighbour," less parrot-wise than most village lads, the* PARSON *conducting and marking pause and emphasis with hand and eye.*]

PARSON. That's well remembered and well repeated. All we want is to act up to what we've just said and all *must* go well. And now, Tom, sit down and tell me all about it. Where are you going, to begin with?

TOM. No furder than Mallows, sir, fust. It's Mr

Scupper, as lives in that little white house as you do come out on the Hanfield road.

PARSON. I know the house. A pretty bit of garden and neat outbuildings. They won't suffer under your care, I'm sure. Well, that's not five miles. We shall see you sometimes at church with us, I hope, Tom. By the way, to tell you a bit of a secret, I *think* we shall have the peal complete for Whitsun.

TOM. That's a good hearing, sir.

PARSON. And what is Mr Scupper, Tom? I don't know the name.

TOM. He ain't been long there, sir. It's pretty central-like for his business and post office and telegraph handy.

PARSON. And what is his business, Tom? What does he do?

TOM. He's a prophet, sir.

PARSON. A prophet?

TOM. Tipster, sir, some calls 'em. But Mr Scupper he's above that. "Turf-prophet," that's what it is, proper.

PARSON. [*A little at a loss.*] Oh, I see. Well, Tom, there's no harm in my saying that I think your business is a better one than your master's. [*He pauses.*] However, gardens and horses and traps have got to be looked after, whether they belong to prophets or not. Take care and keep to your own work. That's honest work, whoever it's for. And it will give you a capital notion of managing a place. You have the makings of a first-class gardener.

TOM. Thank'ee, sir. I were main proud o' doing a bit for you, sir, before I were had off to Outfields. But 'tain't his garden, sir, nor yet his horse and

trap. Mr Scupper's a going to take me into his business.*

PARSON. Business? Prophesying? I'm afraid it's a poor business at the best, Tom, not to say more. How could you possibly help him in his business?

TOM. Well, sir, that's what I was a saying to myself. But Mr Scupper says he's willing to give me a trial. "You've got an uncommon sharp sight," says he to me, "and you take notice, and you remember what you hear and with that *and* sobriety, *and* early rising, *and* honesty to your employer, I'll be bound as I'll make summat of you," says he. Well, sir, you can speak yourself to some on it. I've a notion as I *do* remember better nor some on 'em. It was a getting off the collex and texes as helped me wi' that, sir.

PARSON. I hope it will help you to better things than being a racing prophet's assistant, Tom. But how is your sight to help you?

TOM. It's watching gallops, sir, and sometimes they gets a chance o' seeing a trial, when one o' the stable-boys splits. 'Tain't often as they does. But it's that way as Mr Scupper began hisself, sir. He ain't been at it for years, now, not his own self. But it's that way as he began. And now, look at him!

PARSON. Touting! [*With a look of disgust.*] I hope you will give up the idea of having anything to do with such a business, Tom. In the first place, it's against the law.

*Mr R. Knight's evidence before Select Committee of House of Lords, *Daily Mail*, March 19, 1902. "The greatest ambition of youths of the working class was to become a bookmaker's clerk."

TOM. Mr Scupper says as it ain't, sir. Them as goes too far gets hauled up. But there ain't no need, he says, not for them as has their wits about 'em. He ain't asking me to do nothing agin the law, sir. 'Twouldn't be no good wi' I. I wouldn't so much as hear on it.

PARSON. It is not a plan I can approve, Tom. You get yourself inevitably mixed up with most disreputable people. Gambling is not against the law, in a way. That is, there are forms of gambling the law cannot touch, and as long as a man keeps within them he is safe from the law. But he can never have a good conscience. All your success depends upon your getting your neighbour to do what your neighbour had far better leave undone. We've had an example of that from our own village. Young Simcox, who went from here with a good character into Mr Smith's shop at Hanbury, you know. What made him rob his master? He got to betting.

TOM. Yes, sir, that's what I was a saying to myself. But 'tain't many of 'em goes so far as that. And there's Jem Spalding in the choir, sir. He bets reg'lar and he don't do so bad wi' it neither. But he ain't the one to *rob* no un. It was along o' my sitting wi' he in the choir as I come to get the offer, sir, cos Jem, he does a bit wi' Mr Scupper.

PARSON. We must make a distinction, Tom. We mustn't judge other people's conduct as far as regards them. Jem Spalding is the son of a publican. He is constantly brought in contact with men about the racing stables. I considered the matter when I took him into the choir. I won't *condemn* a man for doing what the law lets him do. But I'll

steer clear of it myself and advise everybody to do the same.

TOM. 'Twould a made a deal o' bad blood in the parish, sir, if you'd a kept Jem out o' the choir.

PARSON. It would. And that had weight with me. You must understand, Tom. I have no right to turn my back upon a man, to say "stand off, I am holier than thou," as long as he does nothing that the law can punish. His own conscience must be his judge. But I have every right as a man, and especially as a parson, to advise a neighbour against doing a thing, lawful though it may be, which will certainly bring him into grievous temptation and make it difficult, or even impossible for him to lead a God-fearing life. Besides, Tom, [*in a lighter tone*] Mr Puddock is a friend of yours, isn't he? I remember your telling me how kind he was in sending over things when your father and mother were down with the influenza. Spying on what a man does isn't a manly action, whether he does it within four walls or on the Downs.

TOM. That's just what I was saying to myself, sir. But, Mr Scupper, he says it's like this. Mr Puddock don't like his horses watched at their gallops. 'Tain't only nat'ral as he shouldn't. But he'd be main sorry if there warn't no watching and no prophesying and no betting-agents. Cos all they little men be like runnels o' water as feed the big streams. Mr Scupper does a bit wi' the big bookies and it's wi' them as Mr Puddock gets the money on about his horses. And if he couldn't get it on, where'd he be? 'Tain't the stakes as make him the man he is, nor yet the pay for the keep o' the nags.

But I'd a deal rather, sir, a been a stable lad wi' Mr Puddock. But I'm a sight too heavy for that.

PARSON. I was glad you were, Tom. It is not an occupation I desire for any of my friends, but it's a deal better than being a tout!

TOM. It don't bring in so much money, sir. And I'm thinking a bit about father and mother. That influenzer guv 'em a main shake and they be getting on in years. And that cottage, sir, wheer they do live, it's all rotten wi' wet and not fit for to put a pig in. And 'tain't no manner o' good a speaking to Mr Jackson, cos we've a done it a score o' times already. And I do know as *you* can't speak to him, sir, along o' not setting him agin the church. And wi' me getting better money wi' Mr Scupper, I thought as they might a took that place o' Barnett's as ud be nigher father's work and nigher for mother to get to church. And roof and doors and windows summat like what they should.

PARSON. You're quite right to think of the old people, Tom. But, not to speak of higher considerations for the moment, have you thought of the risk? Betting agents are not solid people. I know nothing of Mr Scupper, but suppose he has bad luck and breaks up after a year or so. Where would you be? In a gardener's place you'd be improving yourself in the business and you'd be worth better wages if you got cast adrift. But a couple of years of touting would spoil you for honest work without giving you anything in exchange. Come, think for yourself. If a parson, for instance, wanted a man, would he be likely to take one who had been a tout? It is anything but a good recommendation. He

would think that the man would be always in and out of the publics, that he would probably drink and that he would certainly be familiar with oaths and foul talk. *I* shouldn't like to take such a man, if my means permitted me to employ one. Now, think beforehand. What would you do if Scupper should be sold up in a couple of years?

TOM. Well, sir, I was a thinking o' that. But you've allus bin so kind as to say, sir, as I was a quick un to learn and in a couple o' years I'd know summat o' things, and I'd a put by a pound or two for a start and I'd get to be knowed about wi' Mr Scupper, all round at the publics and such like. So I was a thinking that I'd begin in a small way wi' tipstering. I do know all Mr Puddock's lads already and that'd help me a bit and I do know how to make 'em talk. There's many chaps in cottages as would lay a shilling reg'lar if they knowed how. And there's more as would do it if 'twas brought to their doors,* as you may say, by a young man as was well knowed and respected and had a good character like what I've allus had from them I've worked for. So that'd be the beginning of a little business o' my own. There's a deal to be done in a small way in the village publics. There's them wi' stables o' their own now, as has begun like that. And if ever I come to be like Mr Puddock, sir, I'd do like he does. Boys at church reg'lar and name fust on subscription list for church and school and all the rest on it. And don't you be afeared o' me in the matter o' drink,

*Mr R. Knight's evidence before Select Committee of House of Lords, *Daily Mail*, March 19, 1902. "Bookmakers go round and visit the people where they live."

sir. There's some as drink is the master on. But 'tain't so wi' me.

PARSON. But you would be leading your neighbour into temptation, Tom.

TOM. Well, sir, I've bin a thinking o' that. There's Mr Spalding, and Jellico at the "Black Boy," and John Hart at the "Plough," an' they all comes to church reg'lar. It's a wonderful parish for church going since you come, sir, and so every un do say. And they all on 'em has to live by what they do sell. Mr Spalding, he should a said to one as telled I, as he'd got to make fifty pound for Mr Blake's rent afore ever he put one penny into 's own pocket, and there be nine of 'em to feed; and the two other uns be the same wi' Blugg's brewery at Woolmer. They've all got to make men drink, else how be they to live? Seems like as if God meant it to be that way just for nought else but to give men temptations for to resist. For they all come to church, and Mr Blake, if he don't live here, he do give liberal to what you've bin a doing to the church, sir. And beautiful it do look! And when Mr Blake do come here, I've seed un, sir, a sitting and a listening to you in the pulpit and every word a going to 's heart, to look at un, sir; that's what a man would say. And I wouldn't do no worse. And I'd be sure o' having their good word, along of bringing men in.

PARSON. Tom, believe me that I am speaking to you in most solemn earnest, I am speaking as your priest. You pray God every day not to lead you into temptation and you are putting yourself deliberately into it. You have just repeated your

"Duty to your Neighbour"; are you acting up to it in what you are doing? You are going to help Satan to make men drunkards and gamblers, to make families miserable and boys dishonest. You *cannot* do it with a conscience clear in the sight of God.

TOM. Well, sir, I've bin a thinking o' that. And about the temptation, sir, I've a deal o' hope i' them collex and texes, as I've learned wi' you, sir. They'll be your ammunition in the war wi' Satan, says you. And I'll be ready wi' 'em. And I ain't doing no worse nor Mr Puddock and Mr Blake and Mr Spalding and Jem, nor yet so bad, 'cos I be at the bottom like. And you don't say nothing agin *them*, sir. There's Mr Harris, as took the bit o' common down by the cross roads into 's own fields. It warn't his, and every man, woman and child in the parish knows as it warn't his. But the law couldn't touch 'im, not unless summun stirred it up. And it warn't like as *we* should go agin un. And 'twas known as *you* wouldn't, sir, along o' keeping peace in the parish. And it's beautiful to see how smooth it do all go on now, sir. Not a word from no un. Poor *and* rich. And it's wonderful how they do give to the church.

PARSON. I won't argue more with you, Tom. Take my advice as a sincere friend. Have nothing to do with it. You are a respectable lad and you are going to mix yourself up with all that is evil.

TOM. I'll keep myself respectable, sir, I promise you faithful I will. There shan't be a word agin my respectability, no more than there isn't agin Mr Puddock and Mr Blake. And Mr Harris and Mr

Jackson, sir, I'm sure as *they* be respectable, 'cos they're your churchwardens.

PARSON. Tom, I have said all I can. I give you solemn warning that you are doing wrong.

TOM. Thank 'ee, sir, for telling me so friendly and open what you do think. I know as you can speak to the likes of I as you can't to them as is rich. And I don't bear 'ee no malice.

[*The parson stands up, motioning silently with his hand for the young man to go. He hesitates.*]

TOM. I was a thinking, sir, if you'd kneel down along of I, like as you said, just for to ask God's blessing.

PARSON. No, no! I—I am upset. Good-bye, Tom.

[*He turns decidedly away.*]

TOM. Good-bye, sir, and thank 'ee.

[*The door closes. The parson goes slowly to the open window and holds the sill with both hands as he looks out.*]

PARSON. What *could* I say? "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." Are these things lawful—lawful according to the law of God? What ought I to have said? Why [*desperately*] that it would be better for any one of these men to have a millstone tied round his neck and to be cast into the depths of the sea rather than offend God's little ones. Little ones, indeed! Look at these poor labourers, all intelligence and resistance crushed out of them by the system which I help to keep up, God forgive me! A prey to the fowler. Hands and feet tied. There is one thing, then, that they *do*

understand, and that is, that I am living a lie. It is true. It is all true. Jackson's cottages are a disgrace to humanity. Harris *did* pilfer a parish right. Blake's gifts to the church *are* raked up from the vomit of intoxication. Puddock! where do the losings come from that he thrives on? From the money that ought to make homes happy, from children's schooling and wives' innocent pleasures, from old servants' pensions and the miserable alms that Christians spare to poverty! And where do they go to? [*He makes a pause; then, with intense self-scorn*] I was forgetting. Some part comes to my *church*. [*He stands with his eyes fixed upon it, staring blankly at the exquisite east window. Then he gives a sudden start.*] Well! I must see to my sermon. [*He turns slowly to the table and picks up the old yellowed paper. The docket catches his eye.*] "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." God help me! I have made my choice.

VIII

Between Two Trains

A small railway station, 10 A.M. *A cold July morning. A group of farmers possess the platform with their dominant presence. A young labourer, with a calf in a string, half hidden by the signal-box. An old man is doddering up, bowed over his stick. A few village passengers on seat in shelter.*

FIRST FARMER [*local dialect strong*]. Nasty cold marning as ever I saw. *I* warn't coming out wi'out *my* top-coat and so I tell 'ee; and I had a couple o' glasses o' whisky afore ever I got into the trap. 'Tain't weather to come out wi'out summat, be it, Mr Moreland?

MR MORELAND [*a very large farmer; fifty; in dress and manner a good impersonation of a bluff country squire*]. Well, I took a glass myself [*indulgently*]. What, Mr Hooper [*to another*], no great-coat?

SECOND FARMER [*huskily*]. Got it on in flannel. [*Bell rings.*] Ten minutes late already. Why, here comes Mr Steerwell!

[*A smart, active man in clerical undress comes up with pleasant greetings, for the moment interrupting the old man, who was going to speak.*

MR MORELAND. You run it pretty fine, Vicar! Lucky for you she's a bit late.

VICAR. I was having a word with the road surveyor below, with my eye on the signal.

MR MORELAND. One eye on this world and the other on the next, eh? [*All laugh.*] Well, 'Lisha [*to the old man*], and what do *you* want, then?

ELISHA DAX [*ragged moleskins, very aged fancy waistcoat, frayed cotton jacket*]. I d' hope, zur, as you'll do what you can wi' 'em so as they'll let I stay. It do go agin my stomach fur to go into the House.

MR MORELAND [*expostulatory*]. Now just you look here, Dax. Your wife's dead and there you are, alone, in a good two-roomed cottage. Don't you be all for yourself like this. There are other people in the world beside you. You've had it——

ELISHA. Fifty-one year come Michaelmas, zur, and ten on 'em reared in them walls and rent paid reg'lar to the day up to last year, as I got a bit behind along o'——

MR MORELAND. And you're six months back already. And where's this year's rent coming from, I want to know? Sons? *You* ought to know 'em better than that! It's job enough to get sixpence a week out of 'em towards your 'lowance, I can tell 'ee. Here I am [*with an air of injury*] with two thousand acres o' land and not a cottage as I can put another soul into! And those [*coughs*], those *Radical* papers going on about overcrowding!

VICAR [*gently*]. Besides, Elisha, you don't know how much better off you would be. Mr Welldone, the chairman, was——

MR MORELAND. Oh, by the way, Steerwell, how did they settle about that by-game at the Well-

dones? Maud swears she was shunted. What does Mrs Steerwell say?

VICAR. Oh, my wife is on Miss Moreland's side about it. It's to be settled at the Hardings' this afternoon, I believe.

MR MORELAND. You'll be there, of course?

VICAR [*shakes his head with a smile*]. Been hiring Tallard's trap a little too often lately.

MR MORELAND [*with vigorous geniality*]. Nonsense, man! Always room for you and Mrs Steerwell in the wagonette. We'll call for you at three. Can't get on without you two. But I tell you what it is, Steerwell. What with their tournaments and their visits and their dinner-parties and the rest of it, my wife and Maud are fairly run off their legs. I shall have to send 'em down to the sea to pull 'emselves together a bit and come back fresh for the shooting parties. Society is really too——

VICAR. Oh, of course, in your position, but—— [*He indicates the old man good-naturedly.*]

MR MORELAND. Now, 'Lisha, just you take my advice. All your life you've done as you was bid and I'm sure you've come off well wi' doing it. Don't you go getting nasty *now*. Just bringing ill-will upon yourself for nothing!

ELISHA. Ay, 'tis a bit late for I to begin wi' that game. But I d' hope as you gen'lemen 'll have mercy——

MR MORELAND [*provoked*]. But, man, this is business! Of course, if I want the cottage——

VICAR [*with gentle reason*]. Of course, Elisha, if Mr Moreland *wants* the cottage——

MR MORELAND. Here she comes! Now, then, be

careful with that calf! [*Looks angrily at young labourer, who has edged indiscreetly forward in his wish to overhear the conversation.*] Where's Hoffle, then? Why isn't *he* here?

GEORGE DAX [*a big limbed young fellow of twenty-three, in cowyard clothes, mucky to the knees*]. Please, sir——

MR MORELAND. Well, some of you will hear a word about this when I get back! You're coming back by the 11.40, too, aren't you, Steerwell? Organ again, I s'pose. Lord help our pockets! In you get.

VICAR [*getting in with a laugh*]. Nothing very bad this time, I hope.

[*Passengers take their seats. The calf is put in. The train moves off, leaving the only alighting passenger, a fair, well-dressed, tailor-made young woman, with a smart travelling-bag in her hand, confronting the young labourer on the platform. The old man has turned his back and is hobbling slowly away. The two look at one another with imperfect recognition.*]

EDITH BARNES [*About twenty. Two years' service in a rich London family. Quite capable of taking care of herself. After a longish pause.*] Well?

GEORGE. Well, here you be, then.

EDITH [*ill-pleased*]. You can see that, I s'pose. And what brought *you* here?

GEORGE. Got Jim Hoffle for to gi'e me the job o' taking down that theer calf as I've bin and put in, just a-puppus for to meet 'ee.

EDITH. I wish you hadn't then. Haven't you

better clothes than *them?* And the dirt! Up to your knees! And your hands!

GEORGE. Just you see I a-Sunday——

EDITH. Sunday! Here, take hold of this, then. [*Gives him the bag.*] Where is it they're living? How's mother?

GEORGE. Better a bit, she war this morning. Cross this here stile and it bain't but two fields.

[*He makes an awkward attempt to put his arm round her at the stile.*]

EDITH [*indignant and relapsing into her native tongue*]. A-*done* now, will 'ee, ye girt fool!

GEORGE. [*sulkily*]. Ain't you got nothing better for to say to I nor that and me not seed 'ee going on two year?

EDITH. No, I haven't, so there! If you'd made up your mind to come to the train you might have made yourself *decent*, at any rate.

GEORGE [*ruefully*]. A' couldn't get off fur to do it. 'Twas only along o' Jim Hoffle, and measter's main put out wi' ut as 'tis.

EDITH. And serve you just right, too!

[*They go on in silence, she in front, he following with the bag, till another stile lands them in the village street. He stops at the first house.*]

EDITH. It isn't never *here!*

GEORGE [*sulkily*]. 'Tis, then. I be off work arter five. You come out, will 'ee?

EDITH [*taking her bag*]. There! *Do* go away. Here's someone coming down the street.

GEORGE. 'Tain't only Miss Gollup at the Post. And what odds do it make?

[*She turns from him and goes up a couple of steps to a cottage abutting on the road. It is thatched, with walls of timber and rubble. A slight lean forward gives it a look of senile decay, which is increased by the patchy scaling off of whitewash and plaster. A stout woman comes out, with scanty hair uncombed and dress half-open in front. She is yellow and shrunken, her attitude that of a person unable to stand upright without pain.*]

MRS BARNES. Why, Edith, so you be come, then! [*She holds out her arms joyfully.*]

EDITH [*submitting to the embrace.*] I thought you was ill! Oh, yes, I'm glad you're better, but—— [*Looks round with disgust.*] However did you come to get *here?* So they bain't all of 'em at home?

MRS BARNES. Oh, yes, they be, my dear, all on 'em. There's two wi' Mr Moreland along wi' father and Jack, he's——

EDITH. Oh, there, mother, don't 'ee go on wi' ut! *All* of 'em! And in this bit of a hole! [*Looks round small and squalid room, humid with fetid exudation from walls and floor.*]

MRS BARNES. But you've got your young man wi' 'ee, my dear. Ay, he were round this morning a-axin' if you was coming! Come in, then, Jarge, along wi' her. Ay, there was tears at parting, warn't there, then? That was afore ever us thought o' leaving Middleham for to come here.

EDITH. And proper fools you was! What! For to leave a good house like that——

MRS BARNES. What could us do, my dear? 'Twas along o' what I wrote to 'ee. A handful it were, too.

Just as much wheat as a boy could put into 's breeches pocket. Well, right *or* wrong, us had to pack. But there! I've got 'ee back for a day and it'll be your fault, Jarge, if you don't coax her over for to stay. Yes. I've bin main bad, my dear. Summat wrong wi' my innards, as doctor says. It's along o' being about a bit too soon arter a baby. There, I don't vally a-telling of ut afore you, Jarge, seeing as——

EDITH [*angry*]. *Don't* you go on like that, mother. All seven of 'em at home! And you and father! And where am I to sleep, then?

MRS BARNES. Oh, we'll find room for 'ee, my dear, never you fear. There's two bedrooms; one ain't not so very big, but we do call it a room. And——

EDITH. And where do Henrietta and Ellen go, then?

MRS BARNES. Well, there's the biggest along o' we wi' the two little 'uns and——

EDITH. And do *you* think as *I*——

MRS BARNES [*soothingly*]. There, my dear, you be tired. I'll make 'ee a cup o' tea. I've a-got the kettle on, as I thought as you'd come. And, Jarge, do you go outside for a bit, will 'ee? She's a bit upset wi' ut all. I'll call 'ee in again so soon as she's had a drop o' tea. We be like that, Jarge, all on us, whiles we be.

GEORGE [*sullen*]. Ay, so it do seem.

[*He goes out and stands leaning, round-shouldered, against a fence outside.* ELISHA DAX *hobbles up.*]

ELISHA [*with an assumption of authority*]. What

be you a-doing, then, Jarge? You'll have the foreman arter 'ee. Why bain't you in the yard?

GEORGE [*savagely*]. You mind your own business, then, will 'ee? Ain't it enough as father have a-got to pay sixpence a week for 'ee already, wi'out your coming a-meddling wi' I?

ELISHA [*indignant*]. 'Tain't no way fur to speak to your grandfeyther, that bain't. Scores o' times I've a-gone wi' a pinched belly for to put bread into the mouths o' your feyther and the rest on 'em!

GEORGE. Well, *they* didn't ax for to be born, none on 'em, I'll go bail. And if you'd a let 'em starve you'd a had the coroner down on 'ee pretty sharp, I can tell 'ee.

ELISHA. What's come o' the Ten Commandments, then? You just tell I *that*.

GEORGE. I do know 'em a sight better'n a drunken old fool, as can't write his own name, ye can't. You talk to I as belong to choir and—— Shut up, ye old Workus!

ELISHA. Don't you call I *that*, you young limb, or I'll up an' tell passon, I wull [*crying*].

GEORGE. And who's a-going to believe 'ee, d'y think, ye spiteful old toad?

MRS BARNES [*at the door*]. Come in, Jarge. Don't you mind her airs. Gals is like that. You take hold of her and give her a kiss, like as you did when you parted. She'll come round.

EDITH [*as George comes in*]. Just let him come *anigh* me, that's all! I don't want no more of 'ee [*to* GEORGE], and so I tell 'ee. A-coming down and disgracing me afore the gentry that way!

GEORGE. They was off in the train, everyone on 'em, afore ever I come anigh 'ee; and you do know it, ye false hussy.

EDITH [*furious*]. Just you hark to 'un, mother, a miscalling of I afore your face! [*To* GEORGE.] Don't you never say a word to I again, you——

MRS BARNES [*crying*]. Now don't 'ee go on like that, you two! And me as was a-thinking as ther'd be a place for 'ee now, wi 'your old grandfather a-going to the House. And as you might have bin guv out in church this next Sunday as ever is. [*She sits down and sobs.*]

GEORGE. Ay, and I nigh as good as told——

EDITH [*blazing up*]. You told! You! Then you just up this minute and tell whoever 'twas as you be a drunken liar! You! *Look at him!*

GEORGE. Ay, *look*, if you be minded to look. I come honest by the clothes *I've* a-got on my back. *You* be main fine! Can *you* say as much as that?

MRS BARNES [*frightened*]. You be a-going a bit too far, Jarge.

EDITH [*white with anger*]. Mother, you hear 'un? I swear as I'll never speak one word to 'un again, not so long as I do live. Bain't *that* enough for 'ee [*to* GEORGE]?

MRS BARNES. Oh, I've a-got that pain again in my innards! Oh, 'tis terrible bad, it be! [*Bends forward in a cramp of agony.*] Oh, dear, dear! And I was a-thinking as a bit of pleasantness was a-coming to I. [*She cries piteously.*]

EDITH [*frightened*]. Don't 'ee, then, mother. [*To* GEORGE.] Get out o' this, you swine, will 'ee? [*She*

follows him out, casting the words after him into the street.]

GEORGE [*goes down the steps doggedly*]. *I* never axed for to be born. I do know that.

[*He walks away, then turns round, hearing a jeering laugh behind him. A sturdy young woman, almost in rags, is walking up the street, a hay-rake on her shoulder and a baby of a few months old cuddled against her bosom. The white sun-bonnet shows forcibly the nut-brown tan of her face and bare neck. She is a field-woman all over. Her laugh flicks his temper like the swish of a nettle.*]

'LIZA HACK. Gi'ed 'ee the chuck, then, Jarge? Don't sound like coortin', that don't.

[GEORGE *takes no notice. He looks dangerous, like a sulky bullock, capable of one vicious plunge. Then as she stops in front of him.*]

GEORGE. Keep off, then, I tell 'ee [*savagely*].

'LIZA. Don't be a fool, Jarge. *I* bain't afeared of 'ee. You ain't the fust as a young 'ooman have a-throwed over.

GEORGE [*bitterly*]. No; you was made for that, the lot of 'ee. But 'tis t'other way about *some*times, it do seem [*looking spitefully at the baby*].

'LIZA [*laughs and gives the baby a hug*]. So 'tis, then. Well, us do get over it and you'll get over it.

GEORGE. Ay, wi' an ounce of sparrer-shot in my skull, same as Jack Baxter.

'LIZA. Now don't 'ee talk that way, Jarge. 'Tain't *all* black wi' no 'un. And see! The words warn't out o' my mouth when the sun did pop out. See, then, baby! Pretty sun!

GEORGE. Ay, 'tis the baby wi' you now. Much you do care for the man.

'LIZA [*philosophically*]. Well, I were fond on 'un once, and 'tain't no fault o' mine that he runned away from 's word. I dare say I'd bin as good a wife as another 'un. But there, 'tis life. Us ain't a-going fur to shut our eyes agin the sun, when the sun do come out, be us, baby? [*Baby crows and clutches at her gown.*]

GEORGE [*unable to resist the desire of expansion*]. 'Tain't the gal so much as the chance. There's grandfather have a-got to trot and the cottage on measter's hands and he'd a-guv it to I, if so be I was a-going fur to marry. 'Cos he do favour I, along o' me being bred up wi' shorthorns and knowledgable like. And now he'll put in summun wi' wife and childer and there wun't be another cottage empty not till the Lord knows when! [*The idea is too much for him. He turns and kicks viciously at a bit of dirt.*] I'll go for a soldier, blarmed if I don't.

'LIZA. Hark! There's the train. He'll be round in five minutes and then you'll hear summut.

GEORGE [*recklessly*]. *I* don't care. 'Twas the one chance for I o' having things a bit comfortable and I've bin and lost it.

'LIZA. Now you listen to I, Jarge. Just you go back to your work reasonable-like, afore he comes up. And next time as he's in a pretty fairish temper you up and ax 'un for the cottage.

GEORGE. And a lot I'd get wi' doing that! Tell me to go to hell, as like as not.

'LIZA. Not if you do do as I tell 'ee. You look a

bit knowing, as if it were all right wi' you and whoever the gal is. And ten to one he won't ax.

GEORGE. And when he do come to find out as there isn't no 'un there'd be a pot a-b'iling over and so I tell 'ee.

'LIZA [*with good-natured contempt*]. Oh, you be a girt lumping fool, Jarge! Why, ain't there Mary Stone, wi' her eyes half out of her head a-looking arter 'ee?

GEORGE. Mary Stone! I wouldn't touch her, not wi' that hay-rake o' yourn.

'LIZA. Well, she ain't the only 'un. Flora Boyd, then.

GEORGE [*coming closer to her*]. Thank 'ee for nothing, 'Liza, if that's yer advice. Come, ain't there another yet, a bit nigher to I at this minute nor either o' them two? Be quick wi' ut. Here they be, coming round the corner, measter and passon both and that dratted old wosbird of a grandfather o' mine along of 'em, as there's no knowing what he wun't say for to get hisself let to stay. Out wi' the word!

'LIZA. And—and *baby*, Jarge?

GEORGE. I'll take the pair on 'ee [*largely*]. See how he do stretch hisself to I, as you do hold un up!

'LIZA. Well, I won't say no, Jarge.

[*They look at each other. Her colour rises.*]

GEORGE [*suddenly struck with a misgiving*]. But what'll passon say? And me in the choir and all!

'LIZA. Never you fear *he*, Jarge. Speak to the *measter*, I tell 'ee. You get the *measter* o' your side and the *man* 'll follow right enough. And now I be off. [*She slips away as the party of three come up.*]

MR MORELAND [*sternly*]. What are you doing here, Dax? Why aren't you at your work?

GEORGE. Please, sir, I had summut for to say as wouldn't keep. Me and 'Liza Hack has made it up fur to ax you for grandfather's cottage.

VICAR [*aghast*]. You and Eliza Hack!

MR MORELAND [*laughing heartily*]. O-h-h! *That's* it, is it? 'Liza Hack! *I* saw her steal away as if she'd heard the hounds. Well, she's a likely heifer enough. You shall have it, George. D'ye hear that, 'Lisha?

VICAR [*serious*]. Well, George, I suppose I must congratulate you [*To* ELISHA DAX.] Elisha, I am sure the young couple will have your good wishes. I hope they may live to bring up a family like yours, boys for my choir, regular attendants at church and——

MR MORELAND. And good strapping labourers for my farm, boys *and* girls. That's the ticket! Who's this coming out of Barnes's cottage?

GEORGE. I heard say, sir, as Mrs Barnes's daughter, as is in service in London, was a-coming down to-day.

MR MORELAND. Well, I'm—— How they do dress, these girls!

EDITH BARNES [*comes up, bag in hand, and bows slightly in the direction of the vicar; she speaks with the tips of her lips, mincingly and self-respectingly*]. My mother wished me to leave word at the vicarage that she would be glad to see the doctor, sir, in case you should be going to the dispensary; but, seeing you——

VICAR [*heartily*]. That's quite right. I'm going

down and will leave word. I hope your mother is not worse. You are staying with her, I think?

EDITH BARNES. She is not so well as I could wish, sir. I am sorry not to be able to remain with her. I have to return to town to-day and am now on my way to catch the fast train at Cowham. [*She again inclines her head and walks on.*]

MR MORELAND [*to the old man*]. Well, 'Lisha, that's what I call pleasantly settled. You go out and your own grandson comes in. D'ye hear that?

ELISHA DAX. Ay, I do hear. The young ain't no mercy on the old.

IX

Faded Photographs

WANTING to get an idea of what rustic labouring life really was, I was recommended to "a sort of a Radical woman" who lived in a Tory village where she was encysted like a bullet beyond the power of surgery to remove. Her little box of a house was her own. I found her very reticent.

"Things impress people so differently," she said. "My agricultural neighbours find everything all very right. I'll take you to an old working woman who is fond of talking. And then you can form your own opinion."

We went out and I followed her to the back of a row of crumbling cottages, where a very aged woman was sitting in the sun, a rickle of fleshless bones, like an old cart-horse. She was tall and had evidently been powerful. There was no discontent in her face which had a look of innocence almost infantile, rugged and weather-beaten as the features were.

"Now, Mrs Hartop," said my friend, "I've brought someone to see you. He's never been in Mallings and you've never been a dozen miles out of it. Tell him all about it."

So saying, she turned her back and departed. Luckily my new acquaintance felt no embarrassment.

"Never bin here afore, bain't ee, sir! Lor! Now I tell ee. You should a-come fifty year sooner. Mallings were summut then."

"Changed, is it?" I said, finding myself a seat on a tub which stood hard by, conveniently bottom upwards. "It doesn't look like a place that would change much."

"If you could see both ends o' seventy year at once, the same as I can, you'd say different. There's more cows and fewer hosses. And there bain't so many men, not by a lot. And there's more weeds in the corn. And there ain't so much give away. And no un don't stay. There's me and Mary Wills and old Joshua Sims as is older'n either on us, as have got father and mother in the churchyard. But there bain't no more. And in the last five year I've had seven changes o' next door neighbours. And every one on 'em thinking the days long afore they could be off."

"You live with your children, I suppose."

"I ain't got none. There was two on 'em as died when the fever come. And there didn't come no more. 'Tis so long ago as I can't mind what they was like, not when I be awake. And my man, right on top of it, he fell off a cart. And the wheel killed un. And Mr Joseph, he gied me this bit of a place to live in, 'cos I did allus work for he. And here I've abided since. 'Tain't much of a place but there! 'Tis summat atween me and the sky. And they won't do nought to it, 'cos they do think it'll have to be done up reg'lar when I do go and it'd be making two jobs o' one."

"And you've always worked in the fields?"

"Aye, allus. And allus for the one master so long as he did live. There was *men* as couldn't heave hay wi' I, once. No, no, o' course I didn't get so much wage as they, along o' being a woman. They wouldn't a-heerd o' *that*. Same as t'other women, I s'pose, but then they had their men and knowed what the rent were. No. I never knowed how much 'twere not till Mr Joseph died and then they fixed as it should be two pound. 'Cos when he gied me the place to live in, he says, 'Sarah, don't you trouble. I'll stop what 'tis out o' your wage.' So he'd give me what he thought good. Aye, I did cry when I couldn't go no more to field. It come all in a minute as I'd sat down to eat a bit o' bread as I'd brought along wi' me and I couldn't straighten myself up no more. And the hoe stuck in the ground along of me. And John Hamp, he helped I home."

She paused and wiped her eyes.

" 'Twarn't the first time as I'd cried. Often and often, when Mr Joseph was alive, when I'd a worked for un through harvest from morning till nigh dark and when he did pay the harvest money as its two pound a man and he didn't do it till nigh Christmas so as there shouldn't be no proving of him to be wrong in what he'd a put down, extras or cuttings or the like o' that—I'd come in along o' the rest and 'twere 'Nothing for you, Sarah,' so sweet-like as he'd say it. 'Yourn have gone for rent.' Aye, some on 'em would say as 'twere a shame, but there, no un couldn't do nothing. For the bit of a place were his and he had a right for to do what he pleased. But I'd cry over it, I tell ee. And most wonderful respected he were along o' the parsons as was allus

the best o' friends wi' un, 'cos he did go most reg'lar to church. And stayed arter, he did, too. They do say as 'twas hearing o' these here parish councils, as they do call 'em, as killed un. Ten year ago, 'tis. He thought they was a-going to put the men a-top o' the masters and when there come to be talk o' one in Mallings, he up in the vestry and said as he wouldn't have it. And that gied un a stroke. But there, they do tell tales!"

"And did the parish councils put the men on top of the masters?"

"No, no! Nor it warn't like as they should. Made some on 'em a bit impident for a bit. And they be impidenter nor they was now. All fur betting and drink and not a hap'orth o' honest work among a score on 'em. *And* language! Aye, they did work when I were young, afore starvation druv the best of 'em off the land. And the land were *beautiful!* 'Tain't like that now. The year afore I gied up, the thistles in the barley over at Dyke's End and that's the best land in the parish, they was that bad as my hands was *raw* wi' binding. And that's summut to say. And forty year ago you wouldn't a found there not so much as a bit of bindweed!"

"What has made the men different, d' you think?"

"Ah, 'tis pride as do set 'em up agin their betters. And what they do teach 'em in school. *I* come afore these here times! Can't write, I can't, nor yet read, nor tell the clock. But if I didn't larn the like o' that, I did larn summut better. *I* were taught for to order myself lowly towards my betters. And I've a-done it all my life. And its bin a long un. Nigh about the fust thing as I can mind 'tis the parson a putting his

hand on my head (I can't mind his name, but he were a good man) and he says, 'that's right, Sarah! Allus you order yourself reverently towards them as is set over you,' 'cos I did make him my duty so pretty. And mother, she did expound it to me what the words should mean. And then, arter that, when she were past work and did go to the House ('cos Tom as was my brother, he was married, wi' childer, and I, as was all alone here, no un wouldn't hear o' my taking her to live wi' I, 'cos she did take a deal o' minding and where'd my work a bin?) 'Twas the next parson but two he says to I, as I was a-crying, ' 'Tis an ordinance o' man, Sarah,' he says, 'as we be bound to submit to for the Lord's sake.' They bain't like that now, none on 'em. So pert they be!

"No, I didn't get no schooling. They warn't set on it then not like they be now. I went to weeding pretty early and earnt my keep afore I were ten year old. And old Mrs Flint, as were the mother o' Mr Joseph, she were main good to we. Us used to go up for skim milk as she'd sarve it out to us her own self reg'lar, wi'out no grudging. Till one day Mr Joseph as had t'other farm, he comes in all of a blaze wi' anger and he says, 'what be you a-doing of, mother?' he says, 'a-giving what should ought to go to my pegs to the like of they! Get out o' this all o' you,' he says. And she stands up to un, I tell ee. But us never come no more, along o' being afeard."

"Aye, he were like that. Masterful, he were. I do mind how he druv the postman flying one day as he didn't bring un no letters. No, 'twarn't no fault o' Hopper's (as his name was Hopper) but 'twas the

natur of un. Nothing must go agin his pleasure wi'out *summun* paying for it. And what he wanted he'd have, like as he did wi' the bit o' common as have got Mr Blake's house upon it now. Ploughed it up for eight or ten year and then sold it to Mr Blake's father as did keep 'The Red Cow' at Shapham. No, there wern't no un as dared to say un nay in them days. There were a war then and summun did say as 'twas that as made 'em so proud. Bread were dear and wages was terrible low. But I don't know nothing about the war except as parson's son were killed. Fifty year ago, it were. But 'twere just then as Mr Joseph, he took the bit o' common into's field. And I do mind how I did laugh 'cos he were just come back from Shapham as there were some sort of eating and drinking for the gentry a-going on there. Peace? Very like it were but I can't mind it no more. But he were a-coming up street as a lot o' chaps was a-talking at the corner as cleared out sharp a-seeing him come along. And says he to me, 'What was they fellers a-talking about?' he says. 'I've got a bit of a cold, Sarah, as it's shook me a good deal.' 'Cos his speech was thick-like. 'So I do see, sir,' I says. 'And what was it, Sarah?' he says. 'It did seem as if they'd got hold o' summut.' 'About that there bit o' common, sir,' I says. And, 'Oh, Sarah,' he says, 'I've got a nice bit o' land there. Most beautiful it do look now I've ploughed it up. A nice bit o' land 'tis, Sarah. And they may talk as much as they please, Sarah, but they won't get it back no more.' And so he did go off, a bit unsteady like, smiling to hisself so sweet as you'd a-thought he'd seen a vision of angels."

"Now you do ax why it were as the parsons didn't stand in the way of un. But Lord bless ee, they was all *for* un, along o' his going to church so reg'lar and backing of 'em up wi' the squire. And he pretty nigh kep 'em wi' game and rabbits so as the butcher he should a said 'twarn't not much use his a-calling, only for the name o' having the vicarage on his books. And t'other churchwarden, 'cos there be allus two of 'em, he were a-stopping up roads at t'other end o' the parish. And there was a chap here then, as had set up for to do bricking jobs and the like o' that, as were main bold wi' his tongue like as they masons be. And he says in 'The Lion,' as the church in Mallings were crucified atween two churchwardens, a-meaning as they was thieves. And they couldn't take the law of un 'cos they couldn't a stood up afore the judge and said as they wasn't. But he were main glad to get out o' Mallings so soon as Lady Day did let un go and so I tell ee. But the gentry they all thought a deal o' Mr Joseph. There never were a man more respected by 'em all and the parson at the head of 'em. He wern't afeard o' nought except one thing, and that were dying. 'Cos everything were so soft and so comfortable-like for un in this world. The tears did come out of his eyes the last time as I saw un. 'Sarah,' he said, 'I be getting a bit old. And I be main fond o' Mallings.' And them was ʒɐt lash words I heard un say."

"Me, sir? Oh, I bain't so bad off as some on 'em. The parson he do help I wi' the rent and there's others as do make it up and there's the parish 'lowance as is half a crown and a loaf o' bread and

one or the other do give I a dinner o' Sunday. But I do feel a bit strange-like. 'Tis a new world as I be hanging on in. Mallings ain't a village no more, 'cos they be all a-coming and going and a-passing away. When Michaelmas do come round 'tis like as if I heerd the bell a-tolling for a death. The farmers be all of 'em real gentlefolk now and 'tis beautiful for to see the dresses as the ladies do wear and the driving and partying as do go on. But I do miss the hosses as come out o' this very yard a-front o' where we be sitting and the men wi' 'em a-going to plough. And the weeds as I did fight wi' for seventy year, they be all over the land. 'Tis all cows and gentry. And my mother and father they did think all and everything o' the name o' being honest. And now there ain't a seven year old child in Mallings as don't know enough for to mock at the word!"

"And I don't wonder," said I.

THE END

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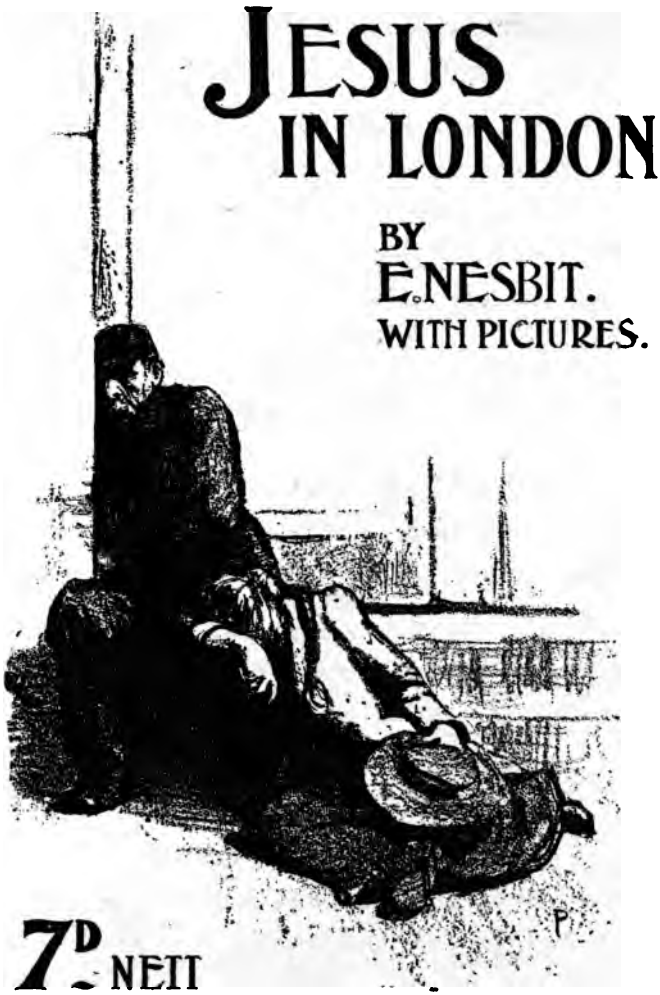

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